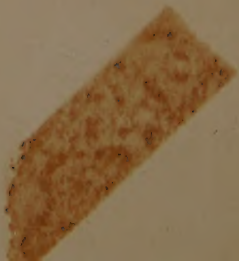
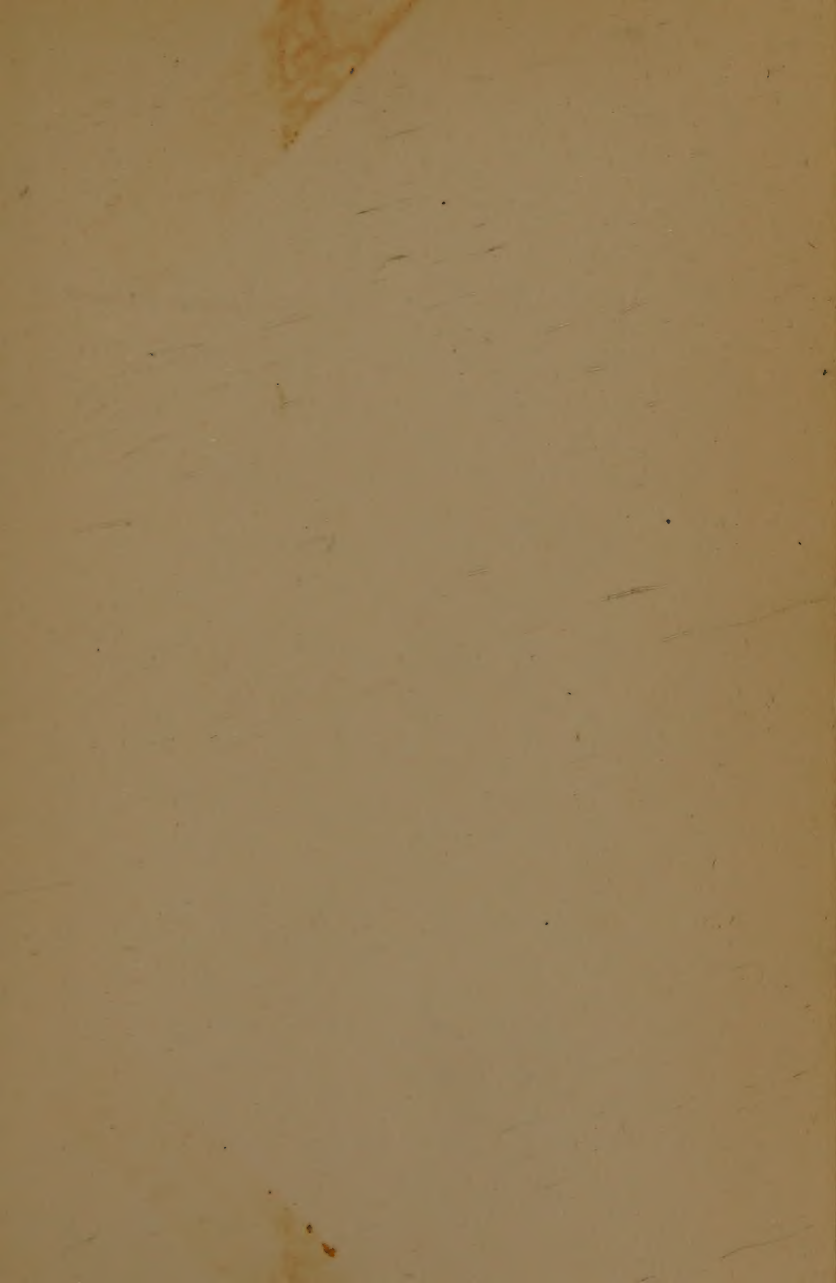




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PARABOLICAL TEACHINGS OF CHRIST

IN MATTHEW XIII AND LUKE XV OR
OLD TRUTHS FOUND IN NEW PLACES

BY

E. B. MINER, A. B., A. M.

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To my brethren in the Gospel ministry, who have
so uniformly encouraged me in these studies in
the years that are past: To all Evangelists
and christian workers, and to all oth-
ers who love the Word, this
volume is affectionately ded-
icated by the author.

Camp Point, Illinois.
September, 1915.

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PARABOLICAL TEACHINGS OF CHRIST

Parabolical Teachings of Christ

I

CONFLICT AND VICTORY

THIS is an age of Bible study. No other book known is today receiving the attention given to it. Many study it for controversy. Many more for truth. Hence, there is a wide diversity in conclusions. Even among those who love the Bible, we find these conditions. This, too, not only as between so-called denominations; but in every branch of the church. Good men take up the study of certain passages with prejudices—judgments already formed. “I have always understood this scripture to mean so and so; and I shall never understand it in any other way”, said a good pastor to a brother pastor of his own church. This state of mind is most unfortunate. It moves the “previous question” upon all study and debate. It stands to reason that christian scholars should come to the discussion of questions upon which they differ, with minds open to receive the truth, even at the cost of giving up long held opinions. For, surely, one must be wrong—possibly both.

In no department of biblical interpretation do we find wider differences, by men of high attainments in scholarship and of unquestioned orthodoxy, than in their treatment of these parables. By this great harm may be done. And, unconsciously, we may be contributors to it! We have a Bible Class of bright thoughtful young men.

We hold tenaciously, and teach, that salvation is free,—“By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”. We allow no one to call us in question on this doctrine of justification by faith through the abounding grace of God. Then we go before that class of young men and teach them that the hid treasure and the priceless pearl, are figures that represent Christ, salvation, eternal life, or, in some form, the highest good that is placed within the reach of men. But, this treasure was so valuable that the finder sold all that he had and bought the whole field, that he might possess it. This pearl was so rare, so priceless, that the merchant impoverished himself to purchase it!

Then our young men ask, What! do we buy Christ, buy salvation, buy eternal life? And what shall we say?

We hold that unbelieving men are lost forever. We are scripturally orthodox in teaching that a very large portion of the human race will fail of salvation by their unbelief. Then we take the parable of the leaven and say to our young men, that this represents the gospel and its work in this world. The measures of meal, we rightly tell them, stand for the whole human race. We show how this leaven, the gospel, does its work. We can point out a beautiful analogy between the manner of the working of the leaven, reaching atom by atom, and the direct personal work done in leading men to Christ.

Here our young men find another difficulty. They see that only a small portion of those whom they know, even profess to be christians! And they have good reason to believe that this ratio prevails generally, even in this our christian land! Yet, in the parable, “the whole was leavened”. The figure and the facts do not agree. How is this? our young

men ask. We cannot understand it. How could they?

Here seeds of doubt are planted. Who planted them? Here the current of a life was turned to the wrong! Who started it in that direction? Who first weakened his hold on the Bible his mother loved? and which he had been taught to study with the deepest reverence? Did he not, in these studies of our Bible Class, get his first lessons in that school where he has learned to disregard and even ridicule God's holy word? He may not know just when the process began, but he does know that ever since his young-man-hood, he has been drifting away from the teachings of his childhood, and losing his veneration for the things that belong to a religious faith and life.

That the inharmony between the common use of these parables and the essential doctrines of christianity has done all this, none will assert. That it has this tendency, none will deny after any careful study of this subject in our best commentaries.

Is it not then a most desirable thing to find the harmony that must—that does exist in and run through all these matchless teachings of our blessed Savior?

The parables of Christ are divine truth in a condensed form. They show the oneness of the revelation in the works, and in the word of God. He uses familiar things in nature to teach lessons of heavenly wisdom: the things that are made, to make known "His eternal power and Godhead".

The objective use of these parables was two fold: immediate and remote. They were, first of all, for the instruction of his disciples. This he was very careful to do,—not publicly, but when by themselves. Mark says (4:34) "But without a parable spake he not unto them; and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples".

Christ had come to the time when he was to fulfill the prophecy of Ps. 78:2, which is very freely rendered in v.35 of this chapter: "I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world". "Then (v.36) Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house". There, according to Luke, all the explanations were made. When the disciples asked him why he did this, why make such a difference between them and us? he answered, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." (v.11). Sanford (*Cycl Rel Knowl*, p. 707) says that this was done to punish them: "In his earlier teachings, as the sermon on the mount, he taught plainly, and generally without parables; but when his teaching was rejected or misunderstood, he, in the latter half of his ministry, judicially punished the unbelievers by parabolic veilings of the truth. (Matt. 13:11-16). —Therefore speak I unto them in parables because they seeing see not."

The remote object was, to get into the record these precious truths, for the church in the ages to come. Some time, they will be understood. There is a meaning, perhaps not yet found in the words of Christ, concluding this discourse. He asked, "Have ye understood all these things?" Yes, they had. "Therefore, every scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth out from his treasures things new and old".

These words contain both a prophecy and a promise: a prophecy that these parables will continue to be studied, and a promise that the truth therein enfolded will be found. It is further our warrant for their continued study till this end is reached.

"Things new and old". These words plainly teach

that some scribe (writer) shall, at some time, bring out from these parables, not only new things and old things, but *things that are at once both old and new*: the old, old truths of the gospel, in a new interpretation and use of these same parables. If it is not here, some one else will find it.

Good men, wise men have studied to learn, and have written to teach these secrets of God, and have faithfully given us all that was given to them; but, having no fixed rules of interpretation, and failing to find the key, have left, in the aggregate, a confused and confusing mass of thoughts and words wholly irreconcilable whether viewed in the relations of its parts, or of the whole, to the accepted truths of the gospel. The finding of this condition was the beginning of these studies, which have now run through the half of a long life.

Any safe interpretation of the unexplained parables of this chapter requires that we have and use right rules and the proper key. Let us get them well in hand and ready for use.

Rule I.—*Allow nothing, as an explanation, however striking or beautiful, that conflicts with essential gospel truth.*

Rule II.—*Let Christ's explanations stand.*

These rules are absolutely necessary, nay, obligatory upon any who would find here the real teachings of the Christ.

The first, second and last of these parables are explained by the Author. In each the evil one appears,—destroying the seed, corrupting the ground and finally cast out. It would seem that the connection is so plain that Matthew thought it needless to explain the others. If three of the seven, the beginning and the end, show the active presence of this enemy, one can hardly fail to see him in the four intervening. So these that are explained, by a fair

induction, open to us the true interpretation of those not explained.

The KEY: *The constant antagonism of good and evil in each of the seven parables.*

The whole is a discussion on the devil in his relations to the church of Christ.

Let us trace these two forces as they appear throughout these seven parables:

1. Christ sowing seed—the devil stealing it;
2. Christ sowing good seed—the devil sowing tares;
3. The mustard tree: Christ makes a strong church—the devil joins it.
4. The leaven: God makes men holy—the devil corrupts them all.
5. The hid treasure: The devil in possession—Christ buys the right of redemption;
6. The pearl of great price: Man redeemed—salvation offered—the serpent's head bruised;
7. The drag net: The catch sorted—the devil cast out,—his children punished—the church of Christ glorified.

This analysis unifies his discourse, and shows a theme and a thought running through it all. It is God on one side and the devil on the other; and the contest is over man.

It will be profitable here to inquire,—

What is a Parable?

The Greek word, "parabolla" indicates something thrown down beside another, for comparison. A known thing is used to illustrate an unknown: something that is, or might be, true in nature or in human experience, to illustrate a divine truth. This, in some form, has long been in use. It differs from the fable, in that the latter seeks neither the natural nor the possible in its situations.

It has no affinity with the Delphic oracular re-

sponses, which were always enigmatical and with a double meaning. They differ also from the parables of the Old Testament, which are more properly short allegories. Indeed, the parables of Christ stand alone in their simplicity, beauty, wisdom and power. The real parable belongs to Him alone.

That this chapter is a continued discourse to a chosen audience is questioned by some; but the text clearly proves it. He began, speaking to his disciples and the people who thronged about him at the seaside, and continued before this promiscuous audience to the end of the parable of the Leaven. Then he dismissed the multitude and went back into the house, where, at the request of his disciples, he finished his discourse by explaining the first two parables, adding the other three and the explanation of the last.

Depending on divine assistance, it shall be the controlling purpose in the following pages, so to show the mind of Christ as impressed upon these parables, as to make manifest their complete harmony with all scripture teachings; and so to interpret the lessons of wisdom they enfold as to bring out from them the richness and fullness of gospel truth that are there.

II

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Matt. 13:3-8: "Behold a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up they withered away. And some fell among thorns and the thorns sprung up and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold."

THERE is not much to do in explaining this parable. Our Savior has done that, and who will presume to amend or change his explanations?

Christ was teaching at the sea of Galilee. The multitude pressed so closely around him that he took refuge in a small boat and pushed off a little from the shore. Near by was a familiar scene: a man sowing wheat. This gives him his theme: "Behold a sower went forth to sow". And what a theme! what marvelous truths he finds! In it were "the hidings of his power". It enfolds the potentialities of his kingdom.

The features he explains are, the four conditions of soil, and the consequent results as seen in the harvest.

"Some seeds fell by the way side." This was the unplowed ground: either the paths across the field, or the margin left around the cultivated portion. The seeds sown there never entered the ground. They laid on the beaten earth where neither grass nor

even weeds could grow to hide them, and were soon devoured by the ever watchful birds around.

These he defines as the inattentive hearers, "who hearing hear not". They come to the house of God to see, or to show themselves—their good clothes, and bad manners: to spend the hour devoted to worship of God, in frivolity, in visiting and to "have a good time"; not to hear, but "to give the sacrifice of fools". (Ec. 5:1). Such fall an easy prey to the evil one—yes, a willing prey, for they invite him to come and take away the seed of the word. These are the shallow-minded, thoughtless ones, who habitually lose all the benefits the gospel brings. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he that receiveth seed by the way side". Mark says (4:15), "then cometh satan," Luke, "the devil". We shall see these fowls, this devil again.

Here, the great conflict begins: the tragedy of humanity opens, to culminate on Calvary, but never end, till the Lord himself shall come to judgment.

"Stony places", N. V. "rocky places", describes, not a soil filled with small movable stones, as in some of our eastern states; but land in which the underlying rock is very near the surface,—where they had "no deepness of earth", "no root". As a pasture, such a field gives the first grass of the season, and is the first to wither and die in a dry summer. Some seeds fell on ground of this kind, "and forthwith they sprung up",—but soon died.

Here we find the impulsive and superficial, who, under excitement seize upon gospel truth, as they do upon any new idea they meet, but having no depth of character, "no root in themselves", soon tire of that which requires "patient continuance". "For when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the

word, by and by he is offended", and gives up his religion.

This is the religion of enthusiasm and feeling. It lacks the essentials for a strong character,—deep conviction and unfaltering obedience. Such rarely get beyond their first experience, and that soon becomes only a tradition—a memory. For, when the feeling is passed and the enthusiasm dies, they wither away, because the soil is too thin to receive the roots of a fruit-bearing christian experience.

The thorny ground is already occupied. The meaning here is made so evident that it needs nothing further. The soil is as deep and as rich as the good ground, but there is no room for the good seed to grow. Such an one has no real religious experience. "The care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becometh unfruitful."

Meanwhile the seed in the good ground has sprung up into a vigorous growth, and is fast maturing a bountiful crop.

The ground is no better than the way side or the thorny places. The difference is in the preparation. At the first, it was all much alike, but this has been plowed and summer-fallowed; and the thorns and weeds have all been killed. The seed gets all that the soil has to give. Even in the good soil, it did not all produce alike. There are conditions from moisture or elevation, and elements of composition which control and determine productiveness. It is no unusual thing for "good ground" to yield "Some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty"; but the crop was all good.

So also of the children of the kingdom; environments, education and heredity, make *individuals* of men and this individuality or personality God uses, giving to each his work, "according to his several ability". And so, one is a Wesley, a Calvin, a John

Knox or a Moody,—the other, you, or I.

Having succeeded so well in destroying the fruitfulness in three parts of the field, the enemy now attempts to defeat the work altogether, by attacking the good seed growing in the good ground.

This we find in the next parable.

III

PARABLE OF THE TARES OF THE FIELD

THE DEVIL CORRUPTING THE GOOD GROUND

Matt. 13:24-30: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares?

He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay: lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn".

HERE first occurs the form of introduction, that, with slight modification, is used in each one of the following parables,—
"The Kingdom of Heaven is Like".

In this phrase are two words which have been so variously explained that they demand here a careful and serious study.

"The Kingdom of Heaven",—What is it? Here a definition is imperative. If we cannot fix the meaning of this, further discussion were fruitless.

It cannot be "The Kingdom" of v.38, for in that are only "the good seed", while this contains also the tares,—
"the children of the wicked one," who are

now mingled in it, with God's people.

Fausset, (Bib. Cyc., p. 415) calls it, "The gospel dispensation of grace".

Henry, (in loco) "Now the drift of the parable is to represent to us the present and future state of the kingdom of heaven, the gospel church, Christ's care of it, the devil's enmity against it, the mixture that there is in it of good and bad in this world, and the separation between them in the other world. Note. —The visible church is the kingdom of heaven. Though there be many hypocrites in it, Christ rules it as a king; . . . the church is *the kingdom of heaven upon earth*".

That is, the church in this imperfect state, in contact with wicked men, many of whom are reckoned in her membership. It has always been so. In the little company that Christ drew around him, there was a Judas, both thief and devil, to betray him. Here he gives us an object-lesson: that we should not expect that all whom we receive into the church on their confession, will prove true believers. This same lesson we find in the parable of the net, that catches "of every kind".

It is called "The kingdom of heaven", or "Kingdom of God," (M. and Lk.) because it came by authority of heaven. Its King came from heaven. It looks to heaven as its final place, where all the "Children of the Kingdom," will be presented to God the Father, "Faultless in the presence of his glory with exceeding joy".

The earthly subjects of that kingdom are born into it, and prepared for its citizenship in this world. It is a heaven-ordained, heaven-sent and heaven-founded kingdom.

Another word here requiring attention is "like" or "likened unto". What are the scope and limitations of the similitude?

Many stoutly contend that this likeness rests and remains on the word in each case immediately following the word of comparison: the kingdom of heaven is like unto "a man", "a merchantman", "a treasure". This contention is especially pressed in the parable of the leaven.

This pernicious restriction is greatly encouraged by a saying that has well nigh passed into a proverb: "You must not make a figure go on all fours". It was given to us in the Seminary, almost as a canon of biblical criticism.

This dogma has its rightful uses, and its harmful misuses. It should hold back an over-active imagination from spreading out some striking figure of speech beyond its proper place and application. Its more common effect is, that it discourages independent thought, and estops that careful study, needful for the best results in the search for truth.

The impossibility of the comparison so insistently claimed, is clearly seen by placing together the first clause of this parable and its explanation: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that sowed good seed in his field. . . . He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man". This makes the kingdom of heaven "Like" himself. That is true in part; but it is not the lesson he teaches here.

In the explanation of this parable, he makes it to go, not on four feet, but on fourteen feet: seven of explanation and seven of interpretation and application. Every point is instinct with a living thought and touches something. It is most concise in its terms, and strictly literal in its use of words.

He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man;
The field is the world;
The good seed are the children of the kingdom;
The tares are the children of the wicked one;
The enemy that sowed them is the devil;

The harvest is the end of the world;

And the reapers are the angels.

Here occur two words, identical in form, but differing in meaning and derivation. In defining the "field", the word is "kosmos"; this physical creation, including humanity. The "harvest" is the end of the *aion*: this dispensation of the church of the Holy Spirit. This erroneous rendering of *aion*, has caused great confusion in many minds, with regard to the second coming of Christ, which ends the *aion*, but not the *kosmos*. It is with great surprise that we note the absence of this distinction in the new version.

In the sower of the tares he finds a very personal devil, doing a very personal work—a devil's work!

He now passes to the meaning and application of the parable, for a right understanding of which we must make an analysis of the chapter.

We find it arranged in two parts: two propheticohistoric stories, each complete in itself. Each covers the same period in the cycles of the ages. Side by side they run through all the millenniums of earth, from the time when "That old serpent which is the devil and satan, (Rev. 20:2) sowed his fatal seed in the fruitful soil of Eden, till the second coming of the Christ.

This duality of Matthew thirteenth seems to have been overlooked hitherto; and yet, it is so plainly there, that there seems no excuse for failing to find it. A possible explanation may be, that this fact is among the things that have been "hid from the wise and prudent". (Matt. 11:25), to be revealed to whom he will.

The unanswered question of all the later years of these studies has been: Why did Christ twice in this chapter, and in the same words, describe the final doom of the lost? This, answers that question. He

is speaking of two classes—alike in character, united in a common cause, and with the same destined end, yet working separately. They constitute the two grand divisions of the army of the enemies of God and righteousness. They enlisted, took the oath of allegiance and were sworn into service at the beginning of hostilities. Their ranks have ever been kept full. They will not be mustered out of service till the day of their retribution.

These two classes are, clearly, *those who are in the church of Christ but not of it*, and *those wholly outside of it*. It is of these only whom he calls "the children of the wicked one", that he speaks in this parable.

These are the incorrigibly bad,—those who have wilfully and knowingly put themselves beyond the reach, beyond the hope, beyond even the desire for salvation. They are the open, implacable, hereditary enemies of God and of his church. They hate God, hate his people, revile and blaspheme his holy name,—say there is no God, no heaven, no hell, no hereafter. These haters of all good are to remain here, mingled with the children of God, to annoy, to vex and to hurt them till the great harvest time of the world.

When that hour comes, which now draws on apace, and the dial of eternity marks the end of this gospel dispensation, the final separation will be made. Then, the last prophecy relating to human history will be fulfilled,—for it is written:

"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world (aion). The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire".

Men read these awful words and shudder, and

say, it cannot be! God is too good to do that. Yes, God is good. God is love. Christ's own words in precious John 3:16 declare it: "God so loved the world". Oh the deep, broad infinity of that word, "so"! Human wisdom cannot measure it; Even the God Incarnate, when he would give to his followers to know something of the sweetness, the tenderness, the greatness of that love, found language too weak, too poor to convey it, and could only say, "God *so* loved". The word contains both the kind and intensity of that love which would save the vilest and the worst. And yet, all that God can do is to give to men an *option* upon eternal life. It is theirs only on acceptance. He sends to them his offer of salvation. They persecute and kill his messengers and ridicule their message. Yes, he is good,—so good that he must separate forever his loyal ones from them who are their sworn enemies.

In rewarding the wicked according to their works, he is also just. This he must be, for "Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne". (Ps. 89:14). Paul links the two together in Romans 11:22, "Behold now the goodness and severity of God"!

It is he, the loving Savior, who utters these terrible words: he who wept at the grave of Lazarus and bowed his head in grief and tears when he saw the coming sorrows of Jerusalem, who commands his angels to inflict this awful doom!

And shall man, sinful man, question or deny his words? "Nay, but O man! who art thou that replest against God? . . . What if God willing to show his wrath and make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" (Rom. 9:22). "Yea, let God be true and every man a liar"!

"Hell" is a word that has well nigh become obso-

lete in the pulpit of today; and "hell fire", is tabooed in all polite circles. Few preachers have courage to mention it; and the people are so cultivated that it must be softened to "hades", "sheol", lest some highly sensitive temperament should be shocked even to nervous prostration!

"My dear friends", was his closing appeal to the unsaved, "If you do not repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, when you die, you will go to a ——— a place that modesty forbids me to mention in the presence of this highly cultivated congregation". But, it is all here, in that terrible "Furnace of Fire"!

Among those who say, as most do, that this phrase is figurative, that it means "conscience" or "memory", or the like, there appears not one who has found or used the one great, overwhelmingly convincing and indisputable fact belonging to this discussion. Mark it well.

THIS FURNACE OF FIRE IS NOT IN CHRIST'S PARABLE!

It is in his own EXPLANATION of his parable. This fact alone, in every candid mind, must stop forever, every word of questioning or caviling, and every word denying the absolute literalness of his meaning.

This, he says, is what I mean by the burning of the tares. Could words be plainer? He who claims here a figure, and gives any other interpretation, virtually says, Christ was mistaken. He did not mean real fire, but something else. The bald statement of the fact is, he claims to know Christ's meaning better than he did!

Here we must most strenuously insist upon the strict enforcement of the Rule: "LET CHRIST'S EXPLANATIONS STAND." This rule is so self-evidently right and necessary, as to defy reasonable

contradiction. His word cannot be questioned. No "redactor" may dare to change it.

The thousand years are ended. The day of grace is past, and the hour of judgment is come. The Judge is seated upon his great white throne. "The rest of the dead" (Rev. 20:5) who "lived not again till the thousand years were finished", stand before him. The trial has been fair and open, for, "the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works". "The wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6: 16, 17), is mightily stirred against his enemies. "For the great day of his wrath is come".

The command goes forth, and the angels of Christ do his bidding. There is no delay, no mercy, no reprieve, no pardon.

In the deepest agony of utter despair they come to their awful doom.

Wailing they pass beyond our mortal sight—

A fate too sad to think—too dark to write:

We ask the meaning—and we hold our breath!

The answer comes from Him: "THE SECOND DEATH".

Here the tragedy of earth ends. Wrapped in eternal oblivion, truly they have their reward.

Meanwhile, a few words tell us all we know or can know here, of the rescued, saved, victorious, glorified children of the Kingdom: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father".

As a corollary to this discussion, what of the "conversion of the world" so often insisted upon? If the children of the wicked one are to remain with the saints of God till the end of this aion, when can that great event be accomplished?

IV

PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

THE DEVIL JOINS THE CHURCH

Matt. 13:31-32: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof".

THIS is the first parable in this series, without Christ's explanation. It probably seemed to Matthew a needless thing to give it. Here was a discourse containing seven parables,—the Bible number for completeness. Two at the beginning and one at the end, the Divine author has carefully explained. Four come between. The wisdom of the church would surely understand them, so as to connect these extremes along the same line; just as the early navigators sailed from one promontory to another in sight. And yet, the fact that there is a continuous line from the beginning to the end, seems to have been overlooked by many.

This inter-space has been filled, often, with the most useless and irrelevant things, till the "things kept secret", that Christ declared and laid open to men, have been re-covered, and quite as effectually hidden, as when "The morning stars sang together", at the laying of the corner stone at creation's birth.

If this seems a rash statement, take half a dozen of the wisest and best commentators, and carefully examine and compare them on any point of interpre-

tation, in any one of the unexplained parables, in this chapter, or in the 15th chapter of Luke. Let it be the "Woman", the "Measure of meal", the "Treasure", or "The Elder Son". Read in rapid succession the explanations and applications they severally give of the same thing, and you will be convinced that he who would get the truth must remove much worthless matter to find it.

The effect of the first two parables had been most depressing to the disciples. They had read Is. 9:7, "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it and establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this." In common with the whole Jewish people, they were looking for their King to come and fulfil all these predictions.

They were groaning under the hated "Jugum" of the Romans, and paying that most odious tribute. Their autonomy as a nation was more to them, at that time, than any spiritual things promised in the Messiah!

The apparent failure, as shown in the parables and their interpretations just given, in which only a fraction of the kingdom survived, and that so distressed by the enemy, was a great disappointment. Their hope and confident belief were shaken. If he, even with such wisdom and such miraculous power, could not fulfill these prophecies of the kingdom, he was not their promised one.

Their Scriptures did not clearly teach two comings of the Messiah,—once to suffer and again to reign, with an interval of centuries between. So they expected that whenever he did come, all the prophecies relating to him would be fulfilled,—especially those of the temporal kingdom. This was,

indeed, God's covenant with their fathers: that good land for an everlasting inheritance.

If they read in Isaiah, "He is led as a lamb to the slaughter" they understood it as we do much of the Bible now, in a figurative sense, finding something hidden or tropical, in words which the Holy Ghost spake of real events.

The outlook chilled their enthusiasm, and led them to say in their hearts, if the truths taught by our loved teacher are so powerless, if his labors are to accomplish so little in enduring results, then indeed he can never fulfill our expectations. The time of the kingdom is not yet come.

He evidently sought an effect like this. He would turn them away from their purpose of making him a king; and this evidence of the deferring of the kingdom helps to that end. He would prepare them for the time when the Bridegroom should be taken away; and, at the grave of their teacher they should weep and lament the falling of all their hopes.

But he would relieve their distress about the kingdom! This small beginning is not a failure. It shall attain to greatness and power. Hence the parable of the Mustard seed.

The seed he chooses to teach this lesson is "The smallest of all seeds". Not the smallest seed that grows, as the botanist and the florist can abundantly testify, but it was the smallest "seed which a man took and sowed in his field", for a crop. So also was it "The greatest among herbs",—not of all herbs, but of those he grew on his farm. Probably in no other crop grown was there so great a contrast between the seed sown and the plant it produced.

This is not a device to accommodate the facts, and avoid contradiction. It is but the necessary limitation of language to *the matter under consideration*. We do this habitually in our intercourse with

men, and no one misunderstands us. That the mustard tree stands for the church is generally conceded.

The small beginning of the church in this new order of things, agrees well with the figure in the seed. A child is born, helpless, defenceless and poor, and his parents are forced to flee the country to save his life. Later he gathers around him a small band of disciples, to whom, after the custom of the old philosophers, he taught his doctrines. His following was small. The largest number anywhere recorded as his adherents, and that after the convincing miracle of his resurrection from the dead, was "500 brethren."

The church began small, and even after the wonderful manifestations of Pentecost and the miraculous evidences of the apostolic age, grew slowly in numbers and influence. At times it has been very weak, and almost lost from sight, as during the "Dark ages" of her history. Even now, in the vast populations of this world, the true christian believers are a very small percentage! The church is a *tree* in the *field*, yet it is a *strong tree*. That is all that the figure here requires. It does not demand that the field shall be full of such trees,—that all the world shall be brought into the church. This leaves the net to gather from the multitudes in the sea its fill of good and bad, and the tares to grow with the wheat till the harvest.

The church should become strong,—and it has. Even though a small minority in the world's great populations, it is the controlling power in the world, and the controlling power of the world today.

But Christ gives another token of its great strength. This tree should become so strong that "The birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof".

The disciples knew the great size to which the

mustard tree grew,—that it would bear the weight of a man in its branches. (Barnes). Then, how do birds there give the impression of strength? We have all seen common weeds in the garden in which the birds alighted to pick away the seeds. Then has this, put forth as a more certain proof of great strength, no meaning? Far from it! This is the one strong feature of the parable: The real test of the inherent strength and value of the church of Christ in this generation, is seen in these birds.

What is the greatest hindrance to the work and growth of the church in this, the beginning of the twentieth century?

It is not the countless millions of the heathen. They stand in all the dark places of the world, calling for the light, asking for help, pleading for consecrated men and women to come and teach them the way of life. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white, already to harvest". The whole heathen world is an open field, ready for an advance all along the line. The hindrance is not in the heathen.

It is not the irreligion that confronts the church in christian lands!

We mourn over the desolations wrought by the sale and use of intoxicants; and no man can count the fearful sum of it all, either on its financial or its moral side. Its work and ruin are appalling!

We look with direst apprehensions on the prevalent and increasing disregard of the Sabbath day. We see it desecrated in the most thoughtless, or the most willful manner, as though no law protected it but personal interest and individual or public convenience.

We are shocked by the apathy and deadness of the multitudes around us, in regard to the things of religion,—they care for none of these things! We

see them living within easy reach of all the privileges and benefits of the church, yet further away from them than are the heathen in darkest Africa!

These we are wont to call the great hindrances of the gospel. They are, rather, the great opportunity of the church! Here she must do her grand work, and win her proudest victories. Without them she has no mission! If all her members were filled with the same spirit and stirred by the same loyal impulse, these strongholds of sin would fall like the walls of Jericho; and if every pitcher held a lamp lighted at God's altar, these enemies of the Lord would be slain like the multitudes before Gideon's little company, each by the sword of his fellow.

Probably, no careful observer of the signs of the times will deny that the great impedimenta of the church of Christ today is in herself: the unconverted, unconsecrated, unobedient men and women who form so large a part of her membership. These are the onus that clogs the wheels of religious progress in the church, and so greatly neutralizes her power for aggressive work.

Let us now go back and look for those birds in the branches of the mustard tree. They are hidden so carefully that very few writers notice them.

One says they are: "All those who seek refuge and protection in the kingdom of God". That is, the whole church; but the mustard plant itself stands for that.

Henry says more than any other I have found about them: "The church is like a great tree in which the fowls of the air do lodge: God's people have recourse to it for food and rest and shade and shelter. . . . Grown christians must covet to be useful to others, as the mustard, when grown, is to the birds." Comment upon this were superfluous. It is doubtless true, that too many do come into the

church to "rest"; but that is not the real end for which the church exists.

Another suggestion is: "The various forms of organized work, such as Sunday Schools, Young People's Societies, Missionary organizations, and all other organized forms of christian work." But all these are parts of the church and cannot be the birds we seek.

Nor can they be, "The nations of the world coming to the gospel", for these also come to the church, and so far as they accept the gospel are a part of the church.

Some things we do know about these birds in the branches:

1. They are no part of the tree. They "lodge in the branches", "rest in the shadow", but have no living union with that in which they hide. They are neither fruit, flowers, branches nor leaves.

2. They are foreign to the tree. They come to it for some advantage it may afford them. Shake the tree and they immediately fly away.

Applied to the church, whatever these birds may be, they are neither in, nor of, nor with it. Does the word tell us anything about them?

They are "fowls of the air". We do not forget that "the air", is the abode of evil spirits: "The prince of the power of the air,—the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." (Eph. 2:2).

These "fowls" are universally represented as scavengers, or instruments for the punishment of God's people, or for the destruction of his enemies. Each mention of them by the evangelists, whether translated "birds", "fowls", "fowls of the air", or birds of the air", is the same word in the original,—*peteina*.

But why look further when Christ has told us what

they are? In his explanation of the parable of the sower, (v.19), he says: "Then cometh the wicked one, (Mk. "satan"—Luke, "the devil"), and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he that receiveth seed by the way side." These "fowls of the air", are, by his own definition, the devil! The word not being defined again in this connection, we must accept that definition as the meaning here.

It is then that same wicked one, that same satan, that same devil who stole the seed in the first parable, that we find "lodged in the branches" of the mustard tree. Seeing that his two previous attempts to destroy the good seed have failed, he now tries a new device. It is his last, desperate effort. **HE COMES AND JOINS THE CHURCH!**

What he could not do by theft and dark dealings, he will try to work by perjury and treason! His children come and make a profession of religion; take the oath of allegiance to Christ; are enrolled and get a recognized standing as church members.

And what are they doing there? Just what they did before. The devil in the church, "transformed as an angel of light", is no less a devil for that. Everywhere and everywhen he is a devil, and will do a devil's work. He has been doing that in the church ever since Judas Iscariot carried the bag as treasurer for the twelve, and their Master; and Simon Magus "believed", and "being baptized", became a member of the church under Philip's ministry. He sits in the pews, his face with deep devotion marked. His "amen" is the loudest in the prayer meeting, and his talk the most devout. He "devours widows' houses, and for a pretense makes long prayers", taking "the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in." He gets into official places, as deacon, a class leader, an elder, a Sunday School superintendent, or teacher of a Bible Class. He kills

the spirituality of the church. He stirs up strife among brethren. He holds a rod over the pulpit, and would dictate to God's servants what they shall preach, and how they shall do their work. He leads a party against a faithful pastor, and drives him from his place. He gets into the pulpit and makes havoc with the church. He writes a book to subvert the teachings of Christ. He goes into business, and is trusted with large interests, because "he is a member of our church"; then steals the money, wrecks the house, and robs the poor; and all this under the endorsement of "Good and regular standing in the church".

Here we get the thought of this feature of the parable. It is in these, and from these, that we meet the most effective agency for the affliction of the church. We are willing to meet and fight the devil in this warfare. That is what the church is planted for. He meets us, when he must, in the open field, as an enemy; but he most loves an ambush, and no where else so much as in the church—"lodged in the branches", for there he can do his best work. The open fight, is for him, a losing fight; but, once inside the church, and the bolts, the bars and the locks are in his hands. He can open the citadel to the besieging enemy, and betray to injury that which he has sworn to defend. Rome fell not when the mighty were upon her. It was the treason and dissension within her walls that opened her gates to her enemies. "It was not an (avowed) enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it,—but it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company". (Ps. 55: 12-14). Only a Judas, one of the twelve, could give the kiss of betrayal.

This test of the strength of the church that comes

from the wicked ones in her membership, is the severest she now endures.

The proof under this head is two fold:

First. Of her power to attract men.

Christianity has become so strong in influence, and her reputation for honesty, truth and godliness is so well established, that it offers attractions to such. It is for their advantage to get her endorsement. It gives them credit and standing among men.

Again. It proves her power of endurance.

The real test is here: her character and reputation are such that she can bear the strain and reproach of this!

Wicked men come into the church to make it a cover for their sins. They are dishonest, impure, criminal. They are discovered, arrested, tried, convicted and punished; and the public press makes it known to all, that they are members, officers, even ministers of the church. They go to the prison or to the gallows like other criminals; yet so strongly is the church established in the confidence of men that no intelligent, self-respecting sinner thinks of using this as a charge against her purity or her piety. Even wicked men have learned that only a *good* thing is either counterfeited or stolen.

There is a wider sense in which this truth applies.

The devil sometimes organizes a little church of his own. He baptizes it with a christian name, and gets it enrolled with the family of christian denominations; but with much truth he is very careful to put into it, somewhere, a tenet or a doctrine that antagonizes the gospel. Or he makes it to deny one or the other of the persons of the trinity. It preaches its gospel, receives its few members, fights, on all occasions, the simple teachings of christianity, and wins a certain or uncertain degree of success. And

that is all! "Hic jacet".

The church, as an evangelical body with many members, moves steadily forward in her appointed work. And, though these larger birds lodging "in the branches", would fain destroy the tree itself, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: 'The Lord knoweth them that are his' ". (2 Tim. 2:19).

This identification of the birds, as wicked men in the church, brings out the meaning and force of the parable: the crowning proof of the greatness and power to which the church should attain! It rescues this argument for the promised greatness of the church, from a place of weakness, and makes it an overwhelming proof of that fact,—giving to this parable a directness and power, impossible to any other view of its meaning. This frantic attempt of the enemy to destroy the church shows in him a wisdom not to be despised. Here is the constant, crucial test of christianity. It reveals both her weakness and her strength; and requires in us vigilance, fearlessness and faith, and patient continuance in well doing.

We are Christ's soldiers, and must "Put on the whole armor of God", for we fight the enemy all along the line, in and out of the church. We are Christ's servants, to spread this good news of salvation in the country of the enemy. The Master has given us his word of warning: "Behold I send you forth as sheep among wolves: be ye therefore, wise as serpents and harmless as doves".

We have but one hope of success: one assurance of final victory over this wise and powerful enemy. It is the promise of the Master: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

THE DEVIL GETS POSSESSION OF THIS WORLD—
PARADISE LOST

Matt. 13:33: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

THIS is the shortest parable in this chapter; but the truth it contains is comprehensive and far reaching.

It is also one of the most difficult to explain: not because of its inherent obscurity, so much as from the unscriptural interpretation so generally accepted, and so tenaciously held.

Christian workers have observed that the gospel is extended by individual effort and personal contact; and that in almost every conversion human agency may be traced. This is God's way of extending the knowledge of the truth. He usually, though not always, employs converted men to preach the gospel, and lead men to Christ.

The work laid on the apostles and the church is defined in their commission: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". This teaching, "discipling", is a hand-to-hand and heart-to-heart work. There is a beautiful analogy between the changing touch of the leaven, as it converts to its own nature particle by particle of the meal, and this personal, contact work of saved men, in saving other men. But similarity of manner of working, does not, of itself, establish the authority for the type.

The church, generally, accepts as truth, the theory that all the world is to be converted under this dispensation of the gospel.

The usual interpretation of this parable agrees so well with the fact established as to the process in conversion, and with this theory concerning the results of the gospel in this world, that it is claimed as a proof of that theory; for, when the whole (of humanity) shall be leavened by the gospel, all will be converted and saved. If this proves anything here, it proves too much,—as will be seen before the completion of this study.

The popular conception of the meaning of this parable is so beautiful, that even good men are very reluctant to give it up; nor will they till reason, judgment, the history of christian work and the testimony of the word are shown to be against it.

This parable should be studied independently of the doctrine of the world's conversion to Christ. If that be true, it does not need this to sustain it. In any case, an interpretation in which "leaven", is given a meaning so unusual, cannot be taken as proof in a doubtful question of so great importance. But, as this teaching is so closely involved in the popular idea of the parable, it cannot be wholly left out of any exhaustive treatment of the leaven.

It is important to remember that this is a connected discourse. It was given to the twelve, though begun before the multitude. "The seven parables form a connected totality. . . . Seven denotes completeness: they form a perfect prophetic series". (Fausset, p. 538.)

Thus far in this series we have found the enemy ever present, ever watchful: stealing the seed, corrupting the ground,—then attaching himself to the tree,—all to pervert or destroy the good seed. If we lose sight of him here we shall become involved

in serious error.

If we would know the meaning and use of "leaven" in the Bible, we must go to the Bible to learn them; and these we must use in our interpretations. Instead of making for "leaven" a new definition, we are bound to let an unvarying use elsewhere, define it here. Judged by this rule it suggests only that which is hateful in God's sight! It stands for hypocrisy, sin, corruption, malice and wickedness. It tells not of life, but of death. Its beginning is fermentation: its end, putrefaction and destruction. It seems impossible to reconcile its nature, with the uses made of it by the great and learned men who have made a study of it here.

Let us now throw together a few of their various and conflicting interpretations; for, if they do not give the light we seek, they will show the need of it.

There is a general agreement among them that the leaven is the gospel. Beyond this the greatest confusion prevails.

Barnes: "Leaven—The secret and hidden nature of piety in the soul . . . pervading all the faculties of the soul, and all the kingdoms of the world." These "faculties of the soul" and "kingdoms of the world", are, of course, the meal!

"Three measures: These were small measures, but the particular amount is of no importance in the story. Nor is anything to be drawn from the fact that three are mentioned. It is mentioned as a circumstance giving interest to the parable, but is designed to convey no spiritual instruction". (See notes).

Dr. E. N. Kirk, (Lectures on parables, p. 64) gives as the title to his sermon: "The Leaven: Piety internal and progressive". The meal is the heart. The three measures he takes from the fathers: "Body, soul and spirit".

Lange: (Matt, p. 245): "Three is a symbolic number for spiritual things. The spirit of Christ pervades and transforms our spirits in an unseen and spiritual manner". Here the spirit of Christ is the leaven, and our spirits are the meal.

For the three measures he mentions, referring to Olshausen, "Body, soul and spirit". And again,— "Similarly it might be applied to the three grand forms of our christian world: individuals, (catechumen), Church and state, and the physical cosmos. The main point, however, is to remember that the whole domain of mind, heart and life, is to be pervaded and transformed by the spirit of God". With a choice among four explanations of the measures of meal, one may be excused, if in the confusion of ideas and tropes, he can be satisfied with no one of them.

Heubner: (Lange, Vol. I, p. 248) "The woman is an apt figure of the church. Leaven, a substance kindred and yet opposed to meal,—having the power of transforming and preserving it, and converting it into bread, thus representing the divine in its relations to and influence upon our natural life. One of the main points in the parable is the '*hiding*', or the mixing of the leaven in the three measures of meal. This refers to the great visible church, in which the living gospel seems, as it were, hidden and lost."

Olshausen: (Vol. I, p. 497) "Leaven: Its persuasive seasoning power forms here the single point of comparison with that divine element which wisdom the heavenly mother deposited in humanity, to leaven and hallow it".

Dean Alford on leaven: (Lange Matt., p. 248:) "The parable has its general and individual application:—

1. The penetrating of *the whole mass of humanity* by degrees by the Spirit of God.
2. In the transforming power of the '*new leaven*'

on *the whole being of individuals.*" (All italics in quotations, by the writers.)

He then quotes Trench: "In fact the parable does nothing less than set forth to us the mystery of regeneration, both in its first act which can be but once, as the leaven is but once hidden, and also in the consequent (subsequent?) renewal by the Holy Spirit, which, as the ulterior working of the leaven, is continual and progressive".

This from Trench, substantially endorsed by Alford, and signed "P. S.", is a little startling! Is it true that the "Renewal by the Holy Spirit" is continual and progressive", after the first act?

Alford's "new leaven" which he *quotes*, is not scriptural! I Co. 5:7 reads: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a *new lump*, according as ye are *unleavened*." This is his own translation.

Trench, (Par.'s, p. 99) admits that "The promise of the parable has hitherto been realized in a very imperfect manner"; yet he holds to the idea of the conversion of the world, claiming this as authority: "Nor can we consider these words 'till the whole is leavened', as less than a prophecy of a final triumph of the gospel,—that it will diffuse itself through all nations, and purify and ennoble all life."

Henry: "A woman took this leaven. Ministers are employed in leavening places, in leavening souls with the gospel. The woman is the weaker vessel, and we have this treasure in such vessels. It is three measures of meal, a great quantity, for a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. . . . The heart is the leaven."

It is painful to find so good a man, using Paul's "leaven of malice and wickedness", (I Co. 5:8), for such a purpose!

Others follow Augustine, making the three meas-

ures of meal, "The three sons of Noah,—Shem, Ham and Japhet, . . . of whom the whole earth was to be overspread."

Fausset, (P. 428) "Though elsewhere used in a bad sense, leaven, in Matt. 13:33, represents the gospel principle, working silently, 'without observation', from within, till the whole is leavened."

But why discuss this matter? Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, why not accept their testimony? Why not abide in their judgment and let that settle all these questions

One answer is,—nothing open to free discussion is ever settled till it rests on the foundation of truth. When that is found and accepted, these questions will cease to be studied,—and not till then.

But the practical question is, which shall decide? It is in evidence here that these wise fathers are in a hopeless variance among themselves. Each one making so many conjectures of possible meanings, reveals a want of conviction or definite conception in his own mind. It means this,—or it may mean that; or possibly both! Might it not mean neither?

In the great guessing contests, so familiar, it has been wisely determined that a double guess, this way or that way, is no guess; and the judges throw out both, though one be absolutely correct. Should we deal less strictly in the study of God's word? Should we dare to teach as the mind of Christ, that of which we have no clear conviction that it is truth. It were safer, and far more honorable to say, "I don't know", than to "daub with untempered mortar". Each teacher and writer for the public should be able and ever ready to say,—Conscious of my liability to mistakes, both in the conception and in the interpretation of his thoughts, yet will I never speak till my own mind is fully convinced that I utter truth. Better be dumb than teach as truth that which I only

guess!

"Far better in his place, the lowliest bird,
Should sing aright, to Him, the lowliest song,
Than that a seraph, strayed, should take His word,
And sing His glory wrong". JEAN INGELow.

With this thought before us, let us briefly sum up the interpretations of this parable as we have found them in our study. Take the separate features as explained by the different writers quoted:

"The woman":—"The Holy Spirit",—"Ministers",—To which might be added, Alford's, "As to whether the *woman* has any special meaning,—it will hardly be of consequence here to inquire",—while Olshausen's "Wisdom the heavenly mother", is too obscure for general use.

Take the three measures of meal: "Shem, Ham and Japhet"—"Body, soul and spirit"—"All the faculties of the soul"—"All the kingdoms of the world"—"The heart"—"The three grand forms of our christian world,—individuals (catechumen), church and state and the physical cosmos",—"The mass of humanity",—"The whole being of individuals",—"Humanity",—One has four meanings, others two or more!

The Leaven: "The gospel",—"The spirit of Christ",—"The Holy Spirit",—"His influence",—"That divine element deposited in humanity to leaven and hallow it",—"The living gospel",—"The gospel principle".

Now why all this? With a high appreciation of the piety, wisdom and scholarship of these venerable fathers, I am compelled, by the results of these studies, to say,—because the first step is wrong! They all take that which God has chosen as a symbol of sin, malice, impurity, corruption and death, and make it a type of the life-giving, cleansing, soul-saving pow-

er of God in the gospel. With a wrong starting hypothesis, the more perfect the reasoning, the wider will it lead from the truth.

This rather lengthy review, throwing together these divergent points, is given to show more clearly the need of some new explanation and application that can bring this picture into the light of his teachings, and into harmony with the essential truths of the gospel.

Leaving all these confusing thoughts and theories, I will endeavor to open out from this parable what I believe the Lord taught by it! That Sin has touched and corrupted the whole human race.

This is not a new truth: only a very old truth, found in a new place. In proof that it is taught here, note several facts:

I—The prevalent use of the word leaven indicates that which is evil.

1. Our great lexicographers so define it.

They know what christian writers say of its meaning in this parable, yet nowhere do we find it so defined; but uniformly as something that is corrupting. "Anything that makes a general, especially a corrupting change in the mass". "Anything which mixes with a mass and changes it to its own nature. Commonly used of that which depraves that with which it is mixed,—to taint, to infect, to vitiate."

Robinson, (Greek Lex. N. Test.) "Leaven: sour dough. Trop. for impurity, corruptness, perversion of life, doctrine, heart."

2. The Bible use of leaven.

One of the best biblical scholars in this country says: "Leaven, or leavened, occurs twenty times in the Old Testament, and thirteen times in the New Testament, and is invariably employed to denote the power and progress of corruption." Let us study it there.

Leaven was carefully excluded from every offering under the law, that typified Christ. Neither it, nor honey, which so easily ferments, could be permitted in a burnt offering: (Lev. 2:11), "Ye shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering of the Lord made by fire."

Only their peace offering, and the loaves of the first fruits. "A new meat offering unto the Lord," both of which belonged to the priests, could be with leaven. Both were in confession of sin: one, a fallen nature winning daily bread from a sin-cursed earth, brings "the first fruits"; (Lev. 23:17); the other is with his "peace offering", a recognition of his personal sins. (Lev. 7:13.)

Christ taught, (Matt. 16:6), "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Scribes"; which, (v.12), they understood as referring, not to the bread, but to the doctrines of these teachers.

In Lk. 12:1, "First of all, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy".

And Paul, (1 Co. 5:6), warning them against the fornicators and corrupters of the church, says, "A little leaven leaveth the whole lump": the very idea and essence of this parable. (v.8) "Let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." If this leaven were the gospel, surely sincerity and truth were not *unleavened*.

This parable is the only place in the Bible where leaven is claimed to mean anything else than evil and corruption. The argument for it here falls hopelessly, when we remember that *leavening* is the beginning of putrefaction—the first process of corruption. We cannot at all agree with Heubner, (Lange Matt., p. 248), "Leaven—a substance . . .

having the power of transforming and preserving it, (meal), and of converting it into bread"! It does not "preserve", but destroys: it does not make bread, but complete corruption, when allowed to finish its work!

In making bread the leavened dough must be baked when it had assimilated only a part of the meal. This does not teach the lesson that Christ wanted,—so he has the woman leave it undisturbed till the whole was leavened—till it had wrought the completed work of leaven in meal. We well know that that is corruption and rottenness!

Would Christ select such a symbol to represent his gospel in its converting, regenerating and sanctifying power? Who can believe it? Who can think of that putrid, offensive mass in the final stages of the leaven—the utter destruction wrought by and under its natural law of progress, and of the holy perfection of the saints of God, "faultless in the presence of his glory"; and for one moment believe that he who spake as never man spake, could make that putrefying power of death, the symbol of the gospel of salvation and eternal life! Let us not so dishonor our Savior.

Leaven, stands for *sin*, by divine appointment.

II. If we say that leaven represents the gospel in its evangelistic work, the results named in the parable "till the whole is leavened", do not appear.

We all accept and hold the common interpretation of parable-writers, that that into which the leaven was put by the woman stands for man,—the whole human race.

If then the leaven be the gospel it must not only enlighten, but enthuse,—not only christianize, but convert and save all mankind. This is the natural meaning and force of the figure.

Christ had in his mind the manner of making

bread in that country. Here is a description of it, written by a native Syrian woman:

"When the Syrian woman has her bread ready for the oven she takes off a small piece of the dough and puts it back in the flour. She leaves it there till she wants to bake again. This little piece grows by assimilation, to a lump large enough for the next baking, when the same process is repeated. If the baking stands too long, so that the bread is sour, she throws away the little piece she has saved, and borrows of her neighbor, as they never use soda, or any device to save it.

The smallest piece of dough is as effective for leaven as the larger."

From this we note: The leaven does not affect the meal in a general way, but converts each particle it touches, to its own nature, leaven. *The dough was a mass of leaven.*

This conforms, not to the general enlightening and refining influence which the gospel exerts on the unsaved, as reached in the mass; but to its saving work in the heart of each one who accepts Christ by faith in his blood, and is regenerated by the Holy Ghost.

Hence, when all are leavened in this gospel sense, all will be saved.

Nor does it satisfy the symbol to say that all living at some particular time, are to be christians; or that all shall be, through the thousand years we call the millennium. "The whole is equal to the sum of all its parts", is an axiom in mathematics. It is as true here as elsewhere. Here it must include all who belong to our human race, from first to last.

If this whole were like the snow-ball the boy rolls up,—at each stage including all former parts, it might be possible for the gospel, in some favored dispensation, to reach it all; but as millions of the generations past have died unsaved, there seems no way by

which the gospel can reach and save all, unless you take the doctrine of universal salvation, and with it, probation after death, for those who die out of Christ. Nothing less than these, can leaven the "whole" with the gospel.

But such teachings are contrary to the word of God. They agree not with the rule; and nothing can be right that denies essential gospel truth. That precious John 3:16, where "perish", is set over against "everlasting life", must be fatally emasculated to be harmonized with the salvation of all men.

The gospel has not at any time "leavened" the whole. The percentage of christian believers, in the world's great populations, is probably no greater now than when the Apostle John died.

But there is another question: Will the gospel in this dispensation ever convert the world?—all in it at any particular time?

The past does not show it. The present does not promise it. The constitution of things in this world does not seem to favor it.

Look at this question in its relation to our children. The best members of our churches "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others". A miracle of grace by which they should be saved without conversion, could not be under the gospel,—as that is for sinners, and for sinners only. Its first word, whether from the lips of John or of Christ, or of the preacher of salvation now, is, "Repent". Its next is, "believe". If all the children of all the families of all the world, should be born into a condition of salvation, without an experience of conscious sin, without repentance, and without a personal acceptance of Christ by faith, as the beginning of the christian life, the day for the preaching of the gospel would be past, for that is a message to them that are lost!

So long, then, as children are born into this world of the seed of Adam, so long must the gospel of repentance for sin, and salvation by grace through faith be preached, accepted and obeyed. And children will be born with the same sinful nature as now, while the world shall continue under its present arrangement. Hence, the living peoples of this world can never, at any time under the present order of grace, be all converted and saved.

With this agrees the word of God: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven . . . in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thes. 1:8, 9.)

The parable of the tares, and also that of the drag net, each teaches this same lesson. The children of the kingdom and the children of the wicked one are to remain together till the end of the dispensation,—aion;—and the whole of the catch of the net is to be sorted and separated at the same time.

Even after the glorious thousand years, (Rev. 20:7-9) "Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth. Gog and Magog, to gather them together for battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. "And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down out of heaven and devoured them." These are men, nations, living in the world at that time. *After* this, the Great White Throne is set up, and "the dead small and great", stand before God for judgment.

It seems then, that at all times, even through the glorious millennial reign of Christ, there will be vast populations on the earth who will be unsaved.

Christ intimates this when he tells us, (Matt. 24:

14,) what the gospel is appointed to do in the world: "And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Here is a limitation of its work. He does not say that all the nations shall be saved by it, but all shall have the witness, testifying of God's great love, and his gracious offer to sinners: an accusing witness against all who reject it.

At the meeting of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, to quiet a trouble in the Antioch church, which involved the work among the Gentiles,—after Paul and Barnabas had stated their case, and the matter had been duly considered by what Matthew Henry calls the "Synod", the official finding in the case is given by James, who seems to have been recognized as the head or Moderator of that body: (Acts 15: 13, 14): "Men and brethren, hearken unto me! Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out from them a people for his name." Note:—James does not say to take them, but "to take out from them". This is a clear, statement that only a *part* of the Gentiles are "for his name".

Again, in v.17.—"That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all things well".

So also in the "New Song", (Rev. 5:9), "Thou hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood, *out of* every kindred and tongue and people and nation."

Of Israel, God's chosen people, it was often as in the return from Babylon, that only a remnant was found faithful. Paul, in Romans 9:27, puts into a condensed form, God's dealings with that people: "Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel—Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sands of the sea, a remnant shall be saved." To this agree

the apostles and the prophets,—the law and the gospel: “Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able”.

Paul found, “A remnant according to the election of grace”. (Rom. 11:5.)

The same is true now. The churches contain only a small minority of the people.

Hence the leaven that leavens the “whole” is not the gospel.

III. When we say that the leaven stands for SIN, the facts do harmonize with the statement.

In this, this parable teaches no new doctrine; but the old story that Moses wrote so long ago. It goes back to the infancy of the human race, and reveals the very source of human depravity.

Christ who “knew all men,” (Jn. 2:24), saw that these early records of the genesis of things would be assailed as myths,—“in no sense worthy to be regarded as real history”; and that this attack, coming from men eminent in scientific scholarship and theology, would finally draw in question, the credibility of the whole Bible, and the Christ it teaches! For if we may speak of “The allegory of Eden,”—if Moses be a myth, his writings a fiction, and Adam, Noah, Abraham and Job, but the characters in a drama; then Christ who said, (Jn. 5:46), “Moses wrote of me”, and who so habitually endorsed his writings by quoting them as Scripture, or citing them as real histories, is an imposter, and the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is no better than any other decent well-written book. Nay, denied inspiration of God, it becomes the worst of books, because it continually claims God as its author.

With this the whole great system of revealed religion falls to a hopeless delusion, and we who have believed in Christ “are of all men most miserable.”

Has he, in this parable, cast out an anchor for

the whole revealed word, for the gospel of Christ, and for the church of God? Has he here given us his own version and endorsement of the very historical facts questioned today? Then let us reverently study this lesson, in the light of his revealed truth, and in that of the harmony of his teachings.

It cannot be, that "As to whether the 'woman' has any special meaning, it will hardly be of much consequence to inquire," for she is the chief actor in it all: "a woman took and hid in three measures of meal."

The picture comes from Eden. In it we have the opening scene of humanity's great tragedy. It shows us man at that awful moment, when the fate of the whole world,—the temporal welfare of all the millions of the human race to the end of time, hangs in the balance, to be determined for weal or woe, for happiness supreme in God's favor forever, or sin, sickness, suffering, sorrow, degradation, doom, death, damnation, and all the terrible experiences of a race of sinners, whether in time or in eternity, was to be determined by the act of one of God's creatures, and that act was to be done by "a woman".

The occasion came from "that old serpent the devil", who crawled, or as some say, walked into Eden. The instrument he used was that beautiful creature that God had made, and given to Adam, to be his companion, and the mother of his children. She, it was, our Mother Eve, who took the leaven and hid it "in three measures of meal".

Our search for the true meaning of this parable will be helped, if we can identify these three measures of meal.

They are not in "body, soul and spirit",—"Shem, Ham and Japheth",—nor in "the three grand forms of our christian world". The demand is, for something that meets the conditions named, and *compels*

the result—the leavening of the whole—not only as a consequence, but as *the inevitable consequence* of her act.

In this use of the parable, these conditions are all satisfied. The result follows as a necessity under the law enacted in Eden, “Seed after its kind”. It is the old, old story of the temptation and fall and consequent sinfulness of the race of man.

In proof of this condition, humanity stands in evidence. Observation and experience both teach the sad truth, that sin has leavened and corrupted all mankind! The word confirms it: (Rom. 5:12) “Therefore, as by one man sin came into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”. Also, Ps. 53:2: “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one”.

What need we of further witnesses? There is no room for controversy, or for diverse opinions, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”; and the fountain of all this evil we find in Eden, and in the thing the woman did. This is the testimony of every witness in the case, whether this parable be counted among them or not.

Now we can easily find the three measures of meal. They are:

1. THE WOMAN: “Instigated by the devil”, as the old forms of indictment ran, “She took the fruit thereof and did eat”. She disobeyed a known and acknowledged command of God,—sinned, and fell from his favor.

2. THE MAN: “She gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat.” Thus, this too was by the act of the woman. It was from her hand, and by her

solicitation, that he ate of that forbidden tree.

3. THE SON: Under that edenic law of reproduction in kind, Adam, a sinner, "Begot a son in his own likeness, after his image", (Gen. 5:3), a sinner.

This sinful nature is an hereditary inheritance, inalienable from the sons of Adam, so long as that law remains in force, and men are upon the earth. The figure from the leavening of the meal is here completed. Added to the inclination of a sinful nature is the great factor of sinful contact. Sin is both hereditary and contagious. These conditions both provide and account for the sinful character of men—of all men. The fountain head has been fouled, and all the streams are filthy. Eve, Adam, Seth,—three measures leavened by sin, include by divine appointment the whole human race. And "A woman" did it.

IV. Hence: The whole CHURCH in this world, —THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, has passed through the leavening of sin!

Even the "Children of the Kingdom" are sinners saved by grace—saved from sin.

This is no new doctrine. This condition is admitted by common consent.

We preach the gospel to sinners. Not to those merely tainted, but depraved, corrupted through and through by sin! "A seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters. . . . The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot, even unto the crown of the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." (Is. 1:4-6). They are "Children of wrath"—"Born in sin". The leaven has done its complete work of assimilation, converting them to its own nature and substance,—not only leavened, but leaven,—before the gospel of salvation reaches them.

Christ came to call sinners to repentance. They must be sinners, or they cannot be saved. But they can be saved, only during the leavening process, which, if continued to the end, is as fatal to the soul as is the leaven to meal.

In practical bread-making, success depends on the arresting of fermentation, at the right stage. If it goes beyond that the bread is sour and worthless. This stopping of the working of the leaven is by the agency of heat in baking. By this, and by this only, can that which is hastening to putrefaction, be made into nourishing food for the body. So, during this day of grace, the fatal power of the leaven of sin may be destroyed; and we who were "enemies . . . by wicked works", may be reconciled and made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:12). This change can be wrought, only by the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost.

As the bread, when ready for food, still retains the leaven, so there are, in the soul reclaimed to God, motions and emotions that reveal the presence of indwelling sin:—and as the leaven in the bread is so changed that it no more works corruption, so the law of sin in the members has lost its energy, and no longer reigns unto death. Its power in the believer is not now destructive, but afflictive. It brings the whips and goads that God sometimes needs to use on his children. Paul, in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of Romans, tells some of his experiences. He did not live in sin. Sin did not have dominion over him, because he had received the gift of eternal life; but he does find a law in his members, warring against the law in his mind, and bringing him into subjection to the law of sin which was in his members. And so great is his affliction that, in the anguish of his soul he cries, "Oh wretched man that

I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The deliverer was near, and Paul triumphantly exclaims: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord".

Every christian has this reminder of his experience with sin. The old leaven is there, but not with its old power.

Three truths are established in this discussion:

I. The symbol of the leaven does not apply to the gospel: it does apply to sin. Sin has leavened all: the gospel has not.

II. As sin, it harmonizes with the word of God, and also with the testimony of our observation and experience, that all are sinners: that even the church of Christ in each of her members, has been rescued from its destructive power.

III. It falls in line with what each christian worker knows: sin working death, and the gospel, "the power of God unto salvation", which alone can save men from the fatal consequences of sin.

These are not only truths, but facts.

We further learn:

1. How sin came into this world:
By the agency of the devil.
2. Through whom sin came into the world—
By the woman,—our Mother Eve.
3. The manner of its implanting here:
By the corruption of the race at its source.
4. The extent of its corrupting influence:
The necessary consequent, universal corruption of all mankind.
5. That the church is only a company of saved sinners:
The Kingdom of heaven—the earthly church of God, was all first leavened by sin.
6. The continuance of sin in believers can neither corrupt nor destroy. The natural power

of the leaven has been broken.

7. The need of an atonement for all:
Because all are sinners by heredity.
8. All these are truths,—whether taught in this parable, or not.
9. This exposition establishes a harmony between this parable and the essential truths of the gospel, that none other can show.
10. If by the leaven we teach the power and process of the gospel in saving men, the teaching contradicts the facts: the whole is not leavened,—all are not saved.
 - (a) The history of the church shows that it never has been true.
 - (b) The message of the gospel to lost sinners shows that it never can be true.
 - (c) The word of God proves that it never will be true.

Is not the position established beyond a reasonable question or doubt,—that the parable of the leaven does not teach of salvation, but of condemnation?

It tells of man's fallen condition,—of sin and how it came,—and of the awful consequences to man!

The picture is dark, and the prospect hopeless!

THE DEVIL HAS GAINED POSSESSION OF THIS WORLD!

PARADISE IS LOST!

How gladly do his disciples listen to his next word,—telling of the great Redemption!

VI

PARABLE OF THE FIELD AND TREASURE

THE DEVIL IN POSSESSION—RIGHT OF REDEMPTION PURCHASED

Matt. 13:44: "Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth it and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field".

THIS parable, and its companion, "The pearl of great price", are usually treated as one. Till my later studies I have so treated them. Indeed, there has seemed to be little use for the second parable.

There is, however, a clear distinction. Though in each the thing of value is the same, yet in the time, the place, the order and the transactions they are separate and distinct,—as far apart as heaven and earth.

The explanation and application that will be given here are so widely different from those usually found, that it will be useful, first to make a brief review of a few leading authorities that are in reach. It will at least justify some new thinking along these lines.

I will try to state fairly the teachings of men widely known, and whose opinions are not to be set aside, without good and sufficient reasons. They speak sometimes of one parable, sometimes of the other, and oftener of both together.

Alford, (Gk. Test, Vol. 1, pp. 139, 140, Ed'n of '59): "This sets before us a man who, unexpect-

edly, . . . finds in some part of the outward church, the treasure of true faith and hope and communion with God, and for joy of it, becomes possessor, not of the treasure without the field, (for that the case supposes impossible) but of the field, at all hazards to secure the treasure that is in it: that is, he possesses himself of the means of grace, provided in that branch of the church, where, to use a common expression, he has gotten his good: he makes that field his own."

This surely teaches that the joining of that branch of the church, "where he has gotten his good", to secure the benefits of the means of grace provided there, is the buying of the field!

In the parable of the pearl he finds those only who were born in that church: "In this parable our Lord sets before us that, though in ordinary cases of finding the truth as it is in Jesus, the buying of the field is the necessary prelude to becoming duly and properly possessed of it, yet there are cases, and these of a *nobler kind*, where such condition is not necessary. This case corresponds to such christians only as have been, from youth, trained up in the way (in) which they should go."

This fairly interpreted reads:—The treasure is the means of grace in some branch of the church; while that "*nobler kind*", who are born and reared in that church, already have the field, and need only to buy the thing of value in it,—be confirmed!

Albert Barnes:—"The kingdom of heaven—the gospel—the new dispensation—the offer of eternal life. . . . He states a case where a man *would* actually *sacrifice his property* and practice diligence and watchfulness to obtain it. . . . The gospel is valuable as such a treasure".

Lange:—(Matt., p. 252): "The kingdom of heaven is represented as having once more become

invisible in the visible world, as hid like a treasure, erst in a most unlikely place, (in the midst of earthly things,). . . . True christianity, when again discovered, is a subject of great joy."

Then the "field" in which "true christianity", has "once more become invisible", and which man must buy to get this treasure, is "earthly things". Does Christ teach that? Does the Rule apply? Is there anywhere in the Bible, a basis for such an assertion? There cannot be! It positively contradicts the essential truths of the gospel! These worldly things: "The care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches", were what choked the Word and made it unfruitful.

Henry:—"The gospel is the field in which the treasure is hid. They who embrace gospel offers on gospel terms, buy the field."

Again: "Jesus Christ is the pearl of great price". Hence we must buy Jesus Christ! And before that we must buy the gospel!

Fausset: (Bib. Cyclo. Par.) "The treasure, the hidden state of the church. . . . The pearl, the kingdom prized above all else".

But let these suffice. There have been given here, the very words of men of generations past, men whose names and teachings are justly held in honor in all the churches; and this with all the fullness and fairness that such a discussion requires.

To comment upon them would be both needless and unkind. These venerated men were good and learned and sincere. They taught what the church everywhere accepted as true.

The one point upon which they all substantially agree, is that the treasure, the pearl, the thing of value bought, is in the gospel,—salvation—eternal life—Christ; and this man, the sinner, buys it for himself.

It is just at this point that the study here taken up differs from them all. This difference is fundamental, radical.

This is not an effort to be novel, or sensational. Neither has it been done hastily. It comes out from the study of nearly the half of an active life, devoted to the study of God's Word; and from a deep conviction that this is the truth that Christ wants his church to receive and hold as the true meaning of this parable.

The line along which these conclusions have been reached, may be easily traced. It began with the utter inharmony of the writings of our best Bible scholars, both among themselves, and as compared with their own truly evangelical teachings, from every other part of the word. Then, as the writer believes and gratefully acknowledges, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and his unfolding of the precious truths in the parables of our Savior, in entire harmony with the unchangeable verities of the gospel.

Take the usual explanations of the two symbols, the treasure and the pearl. They are made to stand, either or both, for Christ, salvation, the gospel, eternal life. The lesson drawn from them is,—that we are to obtain this salvation by a purchase that bankrupts the buyer!

1. Our experience and observation both teach us that men do not seek Christ and salvation in that way.

All will admit that the value of the thing sought is so great that men *ought* so to seek it; but they do not. Nor does Christ tell what men ought to do, but what "a man" did.

Every christian worker knows that the opposite of this course is that which each awakened sinner takes. Men hide their convictions, cover a new interest in religion, by the most reckless conduct, and run

away from any man or woman who would speak to them of Christ, or try to lead them to salvation.

This is seen in every revival of the church. Impenitent men, instead of seeking God's servants to help them secure this treasure, flee from them as if they bore a deadly contagious disease!

2. It contradicts the word of God: "The carnal mind is enmity against God", teaching the unsaved man that he is quite favorably inclined to the gospel. Whereas he hides from the truth, this says that, having found the truth in Christ, found salvation, he jealously hides *it*, lest some other lost sinners find it, before he shall be able to buy it for himself!

3. It denies free salvation! It takes the "whosoever will" and the "freely" out of the offer of eternal life! Christ, salvation, must be bought! It is no longer "by grace through faith"; and, verily, "The reward is not reckoned of grace, but a debt."

And yet it is the glory of the gospel that it is free. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God". "Not of works, lest any man should boast".

These are real objections which no student of the word has a right to ignore or set aside. The Rule must apply, and it has no place in a bought Christ.

With the generally accepted interpretations, who would think of using these two parables, in preaching justification by faith,—that basic doctrine of christianity? There is no possible agreement between such teachings, and that high, clear key-note of the reformation.

And yet these two parables hold the very essence of the gospel.

Christ has not in these formulated a new doctrine and set it against all the testimony of history and of experience, and against his own uniform teachings.

In studying the parables of Christ, as also his

sermons and prayers we are under bonds,—the bonds of loving loyalty,—to keep always within the well-defined lines of the gospel; and to seek to know the mind of Christ. We must, with equal fearlessness, compare with this rule our own conclusions and those of others, in all studies on the Bible. This cannot be too often repeated nor too imperiously demanded of all; for inattention to this necessary rule has permitted, from the study of these concentrated lessons of divine wisdom, a looseness of teaching, and the teaching of errors and false doctrines, that would be tolerated nowhere else. Men have taught here what they themselves would condemn from any source other than a parable; and would arraign the author for heresy. Indeed there is more, and more harmful heresy in notes and commentaries on parables, by men whose orthodoxy was never questioned, than all that caused the heresy trial of Albert Barnes, and that of the Briggs case added to it.

But, on these “parabolic curves”, all theologians agree. Hence no heresy is charged.

If now we can so use these divine lessons as to show their full harmony with all gospel truth,—if we can take these which, as explained, are stumbling-stones to them who seek the truth, and make them stepping stones to that truth,—nay, the very basic truths of our faith in Christ, is it not a great gain in our study of the word? And is it not our right to be heard and judged by our works—our faithfulness to the truth?

This work of rescuing these words of the great Teacher, from the errors that have been taught from them, by his help, I hope to do.

Never before had such a price been paid as that which purchased the field—equalled only by that which bought the priceless pearl.

In locating the transaction let us follow the steps

so plainly marked in the parable before us.

THE FIELD: What is it?

This we need not go far to find, for Christ has shown it to us. Just before, in explaining the tares of the field, he says: "The field is the world".

Using here again a word just defined, and with no intimation of a changed meaning, we are bound, in all fairness, to understand it in the sense just given. The field is the world,—this kosmos, with its human life and history.

THE TREASURE: This is not the church, nor Christ, nor eternal life, nor the gospel, nor salvation as sought by the sinner; but, HUMANITY:—The human soul—man made in the image of God—that value untold, which Christ counted *worth* the infinite price paid in redemption!

Man, created "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever", had fallen, from his first estate and become estranged from his Maker! God saw the treasure buried and lost in the deep darkness of a sinful world: his own image marred and broken by the fall; and, mindful of the worth of one who was made "a little lower than the ELOHIM," (Ps. 8:5, Heb.), determined to rescue him at whatever cost. He guarded the treasure and kept it through all the milleniums of human history, till the fullness of the time was come,—then prepared a price to buy it: "He sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law".

THE BUYER: Who bought the field?

Who could it be but he "Who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty, might be rich." (2 Co. 8:9). Who but he "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." (Phil.

2:6, 7). He it was who, by right of creation, was owner and ruler of all created things! "In the beginning was the word, . . . and the word was God. . . . All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." (Jn. 1:1, 3).

This eternal Word, Creator, God, is he who comes to buy the assets and restore the value of the fallen estate. He "goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field".

WHAT DID HE SELL? All that he had in heaven!

How great that price we cannot know. In our Savior's prayer, (Jn. 17:5), he gives a suggestion of it:—"And now, oh Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was!" What, or how great that glory, we do not know; nor can we here. It is one of the surprises awaiting us in heaven,—to learn what he gave up, to come and save men.

That "child" born unto us is "called the mighty God, the everlasting Father". (Is. 9:6). His were a dignity, an honor, a power and a glory, that were above all honor and dignity and glory and power. As God the Creator of all things, he was worshipped by all the hosts of heaven.

As proprietor of all he was invested with all power and authority in the heavenly kingdom. He was "in the form of God—equal with God—was God."

He gave up all: laid aside authority—took off a crown—put away a scepter—abdicated a throne—and renounced all that belonged to that glorious kingdom, that, as a man he might come on a mission of mercy and love to men! He who was so rich became poor! And oh how poor. Born a weak and helpless babe, of parents so poor that he, the Maker of all, was born in a stable, "Because there was no

room for them in the inn". He lived in poverty. Through all his life he had "not where to lay his head". Even the small Roman tribute came by a miracle of his power. The price he paid to buy the field was all the wealth and the glory of the kingdom of heaven! That so he might possess something with a value sufficient for the priceless thing he sought.

WHAT DID HE BUY? Was it the world—the race of man in redemption? Was the whole Kingdom of Heaven enough to redeem a lost race? Far from it! He gave all that for a HUMAN NATURE,—for the privilege of being a man! All he received for those infinite riches was, "A true human body and a reasonable soul". He must be a man with a body, a soul, and flesh and blood. "He took on him the seed of Abraham, wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." (Heb. 2:17).

The race of Adam might *expiate* their sin to all eternity under the law, but could never *satisfy* that law; nor by any amount or degree of suffering save one soul!

The treasures of heaven cannot satisfy that law,—broken and dishonored before the universe of them that never sinned. So, because neither God nor man could ransom men and save them from ruin and death, he himself became man, that as man he might for man both keep the law and suffer its penalty, and as God make the offering acceptable.

Man had sinned, and man must satisfy, if any shall be saved. But he who would render this satisfaction must himself be a holy and sinless man. Of such there were none, "for all have sinned".

The eternal word was invested with humanity that

there might be a sinless representative of the race who should have, for his brethren, the right and power to redeem. Christ, our elder brother and only kin who ever lived a sinless life has, by virtue of his manhood, the right to stand in our place under the law; and by his perfect holiness the ability to redeem.

Thus, in buying our manhood, he bought the right of redemption for all the race.

To obtain that manhood he must lay aside all his powers and prerogatives, and be born into this world as other men. To this end he was "made of a woman, made under the law". This man must have a body to offer, and a soul to suffer, and both truly human. "Wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith, 'sacrifices and offerings thou wouldst not, but a *body* hast thou prepared me'".

The sacrifice for sin was not made when he came into this world. In that great renunciation—the sacrificing of the Heavenly Kingdom,—when he sold all that he had, he did not purchase human nature, but *a* human nature,—did not redeem man, but became man.

All that Christ did in his coming and life here was to establish his right to redeem, and purchase that with which redemption could be made—a coin current in the Kingdom of God.

The act of redemption was another and a later one,—when, by the cross, that body, in its perfect manhood, invested with all the value of the kingdom of heaven was offered a sacrifice for sin and for sinners.

Thus a second time he went and sold all that he had, not now to buy the field, but the precious thing in the field. And here we find the Pearl of great price. This is redemption.

Therefore these two parables are not identical. They do not teach the same thing. The two great

sacrifices found here are the two sacrifices that were really made for man: the heavenly renunciation and the earthly crucifixion! They are just as far apart as heaven and earth,—the throne of God and Golgotha. One begins where the other ends.

In each Christ is the buyer; and a race lost in sin is the object of supreme desire.

VII

PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

REDEMPTION: DELIVERED FROM THE POWER OF THE DEVIL

Matt. 13:45: "Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it".

THIS parable, commonly treated as so nearly identical with that of the field and treasure as to admit of no separate, individual use, is now found to have a meaning and use of its own.

In a sense the two are similar. Each contemplates the recovery of man from his lost condition. The pearl, like the treasure, stands for man as a subject of divine grace.

The relation between them is the same as the buying of a claim, and the working of the mine—the purchase of the land, and the taking out of its treasured coal and oil; each of which has its separate investment or expense.

Two transactions are clearly shown in these two parables. Making them identical, we lose their strength, their beauty and their divinely taught lesson. One only shows the purchase of the field, with a legal right to its buried treasures: the other, by an added price, takes from the field, now his by purchase, the thing of value known to be hidden there, and for which he made the purchase.

In each the buying impoverished him. He gave all that he had. So, the thing he bought, represented his entire estate.

Both parables, or the facts behind them, are referred to by Paul in Phil. 2:6-8.

The first in vs. 6, 7: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of sinful men". The new version reads, "Emptied himself, taking the form of a servant".

This is most clearly his pre-natal sacrifice, by the renunciation of his glorious heavenly estate; and his incarnation as a man. Here is the buying of the field.

The other transaction we find in the 8th verse: "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross".

The humiliation was infinite, when he was made "in the likeness of sinful flesh"; (Rom. 8:3); and yet again, as a *man* he humbled himself, even to die on the cross. In this he took the most degraded and degrading punishment known to that age. None but slaves and aliens and of these, the lowest of criminals, were allowed to be crucified.

No one will question that in this (Phil. 2:8), we have the great atonement,—the sacrifice made with blood, for the redemption of man. Here too, we find the pearl of great price.

In the first quotation, (vs. 6, 7), he took a human nature, became a man: in the other he gave this nature, body and soul, an offering for sin, to redeem his fellow men.

Here we come to that for which all else was but preparatory,—REDEMPTION.

Having invested in manhood all the wealth of

heaven, he laid this priceless thing a sacrifice on Calvary.

He gave it not as he bought it, in infantile weakness, but in all the strength of his perfect manhood. With this he buys that precious thing, the object of his infinite desire. Truly, "The redemption of their soul is precious". (Ps. 49:8). This "Man Christ Jesus",—"The last Adam", takes the place of man under the law, to bear his sins and punishment,—both by his voluntary act and by divine appointment: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all", (Is. 53:6),—and he "bare our sins in his own body on the tree". (1 Pe. 2:24).

The sentence of man—all men—was to death! So he, the representative man, must "taste death for every man". He gave his life for our life, his blood for our cleansing, his body "a sacrifice to God", and "his soul an offering for sin": all of which Paul sums up in Eph. 5:2, "And hath given *himself* for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God".

This parable is but another version by the same author of Jn. 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life".

There is more than we are wont to see in, "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death". The cross as the instrument and crucifixion as the manner of his death, had not in them the conditions of so deep a humiliation as the death itself. Giving up his life, was, for the time, a submission to the power of the devil. This he must do to that extent, to truly take man's place. He, the sinless, must suffer for sin. He, the holy, must feel satan's rod. He, the giver of eternal life, must give up his life to "him that had the power of death, that is the devil". (Heb. 2:14).

That was the real sacrifice of Calvary,—a submission even unto death to the recognized power of satan. Christ's mission was, "To turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of satan unto God". When he submitted under that power his bodily life, he broke forever that power over the spiritual life.

That satan has great power in this world is abundantly proven by the word. He is, (Jn. 12:31) "The prince of the power of the air". Three times in John, (12:31—14:30—16:11), Christ calls him "The Prince of this world".

It is this that gives meaning to that scene in the temptation, where he offers to Christ "All the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them". There was in this more than an empty boast. He did hold a claim on that he offered. The temptation was a real thing. To reply with the cheap rhetoric so often used, "And the poor devil didn't own a foot of it all", makes the temptation of Christ a farce. He was tempted, there and then.

The devil knew Christ, and knew that the promise to him in Ps. 2:8 was sure: "The heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession". He knew that God had decreed, what was given form later, in Rev. 11:15, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." This, his admitted power, he knew he must give up to Christ. But, can he not compromise? Can he not yield in form, but in fact, hold and confirm the supremacy he gained in Eden? So he comes with this proposition: You are to have this power and glory, but your plan is to get it in a painful, humiliating way. Now let me help you to acquire it more easily. There is only one small condition,—"Bow down and worship me". The bald

absurdity of the suggestion seems to indicate that that old serpent that crawled into Eden had lost the subtlety that he so successfully used there. While seeming to give up all, he gives up nothing. If Christ would worship him, it was an acknowledgment of his supremacy,—and the mission of Christ was defeated.

Christ does not deny the validity of his claim, but proposes to meet it. Man was "sold under sin". The whole atoning sacrifice was the price of his redemption.

When satan, baffled in the temptation, finally secured the death of Christ, he over-reached himself. The breaking of his power was assured in that one exercise of it. This began to appear when Christ rose from the dead. Satan who so freely quoted scripture, then recalled Micah 7:8, "Rejoice not over me O mine enemy; when I fall I shall rise".

So he bought the pearl,—redeemed man from under his hopeless, self-imposed bondage, and freely offers eternal life to all.

The buying of the field did not secure the treasure: the coming of Christ into this world did not purchase redemption. The precious pearl must be bought in a separate purchase; and the great sacrifice on Calvary must be made, or man is lost forever! Without this the offer of life could not have been made; and salvation on any terms could never have been brought within the possible reach of man. So, a second time he "Went and sold all that he had and bought it."

The Prince of this world is dethroned. Man is absolved from that allegiance to him, which he was utterly powerless to break; and now, renders service only by the act of his own will.

The kingdom of Christ is set up—the invitations of the gospel are as wide as humanity: "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely":

And though "Now we see not yet all things put under him", yet we know that the promise is sure and unfailing: "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death!"

Several important thoughts come naturally from this study.

1. These teachings will doubtless be considered new as interpretations of these two related parables. That they are new as Bible truths, none will charge, for they embody the very essentials of the gospel of salvation; but they are confessedly new in this connection.

The author of these studies confesses here, that, in what he then supposed the final copy of a portion of this manuscript, he wrote: "The 'treasure' and the 'pearl' may, under closer study, reveal a difference in meaning; but such does not yet appear". The discovery of a separate meaning and use for each is among the later results of this study; and, like the others, came as a beautiful surprise.

Coming so and fitting so perfectly with the known facts of gospel truth: Christ's voluntary impoverishment in taking our human nature, and the giving of that body a sacrifice for man,—seem a strong confirmation of the correctness of these interpretations.

But we are so wedded to the old idea that in the buying of the field and the treasured pearl, Christ is teaching how men secure salvation, that many will be inclined to reject, without hesitation and without study, any interpretation that does not follow the old paths.

One of the slanders on the intelligence of this age has been put in this form: "A man may say with impunity, that which is new but not true, or true but not new; but if it be both new and true, he says it at his peril". And yet truth will triumph.

The one thing to ask in this, as in all study of the Bible is, "Are these things so"? Are we justified in so using these parables?

2. The safe thing then is to apply the RULE: "Admit nothing, as an interpretation, that conflicts with essential gospel truth". Compare it first with the commonly accepted use of these parables. Does it not, fairly and justly, cut off at the root the larger part of all you find in explanation of this whole series? and especially of these?

Take the only explanation that you will find of the two parables now before us: Is it an accepted truth in gospel teaching that the sinner buys Christ, buys salvation, buys eternal life? Does he buy the "worldly things", in which this treasure is lost? Surely it does contradict the rule; and what is more it denies the only ground upon which any man can be saved,—justification by grace through faith.

Now apply the same rule to the teachings here given: Is it true that he was rich, and for our sakes became poor? Is it true that he did give up all the glory and honor and power of heaven, as a necessary condition to manhood in this world? Is it true that he did offer that body, bought at such a price, a sacrifice to redeem man from under the law? These facts no christian believer would ever deny.

So far then the rule compares with the "new" rather than with the old, and these studies are under the disadvantage of being both new and true.

3. It is eminently worthy of Christ that he should tell us these things and that he should put them in this form.

These truths of his kingdom could not be received by that generation. The time for their publication was not yet come. These gems of divine thought were given for us; "And they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are

come”.

He did not then teach, even to his disciples, all that he wished them to know as furnishment for their work, for they could “not bear them” at that stage of their preparation.

One eminent biblical scholar has well said: “The Lord allows his servants to get only one little inch of truth at a time.” His Spirit guards these treasured things, and reveals them when and to whom he will.

4. The teachings here given are truths, whether rightly found in these parables or not.

No one who accepts the New Testament as inspired of God, will call in question *any* one of the teachings here put forth.

The renunciation of his heavenly riches even unto poverty, when the word was made flesh, is as plainly declared as is the later sacrifice on Calvary. Commercially the two are distinct as two transactions can be; for one was done in heaven and the other on the earth. When speaking these parables he stood between the two.

5. This use of them lays them squarely on the great truths of the gospel, whereas the other does not.

You cannot say that the sinner buys Christ, salvation, eternal life, as the field and the treasure are bought, without denying hopelessly, the great fundamental facts of a free salvation, a truth held by every evangelical christian; and which, denied, salvation for lost men, is forever impossible!

6. Were it not, then, better to let Christ say here what is true of him and his work, than to make him say of man and of man’s work what is not true? And what taught from any scripture other than a parable, not one of the great and good men who write these things, would either say or approve?

There is a painful impression that such a radical change in the interpretation and use of these parables, is liable to place the author as an Ishmaelite among Bible students,—his hand against every man and every man's hand against him. But the higher question is, does this view remove discord and confusion from these studies? And does it bring out from them harmony with truth as taught by Christ and by those whom the Holy Spirit guided?

The time has surely come when some one should put these gems of the Master into a setting of truth. That can be done only by the Spirit of Truth promised to the disciples, and working in those whom he calls to that work. If this be not from Him it is unworthy a place in the literature of the gospel. If it be from him it is worthy of all acceptance.

7. And how it exalts our conception of God's love in bringing salvation to man!

When you tell me that this treasure-bearing field, this precious pearl is Christ, salvation, and I am to buy them, I am overwhelmed with a conviction of hopeless bankruptcy. I cannot pay a mill on a million,—no, nor the fraction of it! I have absolutely nothing to offer; and with heaven in sight, am lost forever. But when I see in these symbols myself, and God by his Son redeeming *me*, I am filled with astonishment, gratitude and praise—while in deepest humility I adore,

“His sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love”.

I wonder not that Christ could only say, “God so loved”. That is all we can know about it. There is no language that can express to our comprehension the infinite love of God to us, when to merely *offer* a salvation that so many would reject, he gave such a double price as the heavenly kingdom and the God incarnate.

It is not presumption to say that I, you, *man*, is

that priceless thing—the treasure, the pearl. It is only what the great truths of redemption everywhere assert. “Ye are bought with a price”—“God so loved the world”.

This is a test, not a measure of God’s love. No man can measure,—no human language express the infinite meaning of that word “so”. Even what he gave, we cannot comprehend. Enough to know that his love for man was so great, that once in heaven, and once on the earth, he gave for him “all that he had”.

8. We learn here God’s valuation of manhood.

He has fixed its price by what he gave for it, and what he bought with it.

What then is the value of a man? Let “the Man Christ Jesus”,—the crucified one of Golgotha, give the answer.

Here is the heaven-given equation:

The Heavenly Kingdom—equal in value to Christ’s manhood:

Christ’s Manhood—equal to all manhood!

Dare we—yes we must—take away the middle term, and under an axiom of mathematics,—“Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other”, leave the equation thus:

The wealth of the whole heavenly kingdom—equal in value to the whole lost and fallen race of man! Or reversing the members: The lost and ruined race of Man,—has a value equal to all Christ’s heavenly possessions!

We see so much of manhood in its degradation that it sometimes seems very mean and worthless. Let us consider its value as shown in these transactions, and our conception of it will be infinitely raised.

When we see what Christ gave for a human body and a human soul, we shall better appreciate the loss, when a soul is lost. Then, too, we can more earnest-

ly and intelligently labor for its salvation.

Oh how priceless is *man*, as seen in the light here shown! "When I consider thy heavens the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is MAN that thou art mindful of HIM, or the son of man, that thou visitest him!"

VIII

PARABLE OF THE DRAG-NET

THE DEVIL CAST OUT OF THE CHURCH—PARADISE REGAINED

Matt. 13:47, 48: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that is cast into the sea and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels and cast the bad away".

THE explanation follows immediately:
"So shall it be in the end of this world: the angels shall come forth and shall sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth".

This explanation is almost identical with that of the tares, with one notable difference. There, the gathering was from the whole field, "the world", exclusive of the church. Here it is only "from among the just"—the church.

This, like the first two, is interpreted by the Author. He does not cover all the points as in the other parable. He has one great truth to teach—one terrible warning to give. This he makes very plain.

The terms used hardly need defining, yet a brief review may not be unprofitable.

The net: the church as we see it, containing the good and the bad. The sea: Stands, as it usually does when used figuratively, for the peoples and nations of the world. The net is cast where men are.

The catch: It "gathered of every kind": fishes good and bad, sticks and weeds. Here again he

brings to view the mingled elements and imperfect condition of the church in this dispensation.

We are sometimes troubled, and the church suffers reproach and loss by reason of those in it who do not live and act as christians should. As ministers and officers we blame ourselves for this state of things; but the teachings of Christ are uniformly, as here, that these conditions are to be expected. They must obtain here, for we receive men into the church on what they profess, both as to belief and experience. If they are mistaken, or profess what they have never experienced, they and not the church, bear the responsibility.

The world: Here, as in verse thirty-nine, the word is *aion*, a period, a dispensation. It was of this that the disciples questioned in Matthew twenty-four, three: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world"? The rendering of *aion* and *kosmos* by the same word, as is done in these parables, causes misunderstanding, or at the least, confusion of ideas. "The harvest is the end of the *aion*": "The field is the *kosmos*: this habitable earth and its peoples—this theater of sin, redemption and gospel work. Each, as before seen, covers the whole period of human probation. When it ends the "tares" and the "bad" from the net will meet a common fate.

The "wicked": who are they?

1. They are men: bad men: men who have been in reach of the Bible and of all the means of grace.

2. They are "church members". By a profession that was accepted as genuine, they have been enrolled among the people of God, for they were "gathered out from among the just".

3. They are "the birds of the air". We know them. We have met them before. They stole the seed in the first parable, where Christ introduces

them to us,—“The evil one”, the devil! This is their character wherever found. The “air” is their abode. There they have a kingdom and a king, to whom they render implicit obedience. This is Paul’s testimony. (Eph. 2 :2) “The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”.

These same identical “birds”, we find hiding in the branches of the mustard tree. “Transformed into an angel of light, . . . whose end shall be according to their works”.

We come now to the one great lesson of this parable: God’s dealing with the wicked in his church.

In this final classification he does not speak of tares or of fishes. All metaphors disappear. It is “the wicked” and “the just”, with whom the angels have to deal.

He speaks also of a definite part of the human race: those in the net, not those left in the sea where the net was dragged. *Their* story was finished in the parable of the tares. It is of these and of these alone that he says, “The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

These are the most terrible words in the Bible! Did He utter them? Did He mean that? Let us then reverently study His words with hearts open to receive his thought,—fearing nothing so much as the failing to learn just what He would teach us. If this as it stands be his meaning, let us receive it as the very Word of God.

It is not surprising that men find here metaphorical meanings. Nor, indeed, that the popular style of preaching falls into that line of sentiment, magnifying the kindlier attributes of God. Men dwell on

his love, his mercy, his long-suffering, his forgiveness and his tender compassion, till his "justice and judgment" are quite forgotten.

Almost every writer on these parables speaks of these terms as "figurative":

Barnes,— "An expressive image of suffering":

Lange,— "These fiery torments which the wicked endure, bring out the inward hell existing in the bosom of humanity. All these contrasts point to the fact that it is the wicked who make hell what it is". This would make hell only another edition of this world, with the righteous left out!

Sanford, (*Cyc. Rel. Kn'lg*, p. 777), "They, (the scriptures), employ the most horrible imagery to exhibit the nature of the suffering impending over those who die in their sins. The fact that these representations are largely figurative, does not relieve, but heighten their awful meaning".

Surely, if putting out the fires of hell, but adds to the horrors of the situation, let us, by every consideration of pity, bank them in and keep them alive as a merciful relief to the lost! It seems really cruel to make it a metaphor, and then say that real hell fire were more than endurable compared with that it stands for! Better literal.

Dr. A. A. Hodge, whose eminent scholarship and profound veneration for the scriptures, entitle him to great authority on all themes of sacred study, in his Philadelphia lectures, (1886, p. 448), says, "The fire (which is the metaphor expressing their torment,) is declared to be everlasting".

Many of the old theologians taught and preached this doctrine in its most awful significance. They thundered the law from their pulpits, then held men shuddering and quaking over the lake of fire and brimstone.

When Edwards preached his great sermon, "Sin-

ners in the hands of an angry God", he held them by a single thread, over the burning pit, the flames leaping high around them, threatening at any moment to burn off the thread and let them fall! Portions of that sermon are scarcely exceeded in awfulness by the most lurid pictures of Dante's *Inferno*!

They call those pictures "horrible", "awful", and such they are, in the strongest sense. So was the destruction of the people of the land when, by God's command, the Jews took possession of Palestine. Awful, too, was the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, over which Jesus wept, when, as Josephus tells us, a million of Jews perished!

But the question is not one of sympathies and aesthetics, but of truth and facts. The all-important thing to find here is,—what did Christ *say*? What did he want his people to learn from this parable? This answered moves the previous question on all this discussion. It stops debate.

The question is,—Are his words explaining the parable of the drag-net to be taken in a literal, or in a figurative sense? Did he mean just what he said, or something else?

It seems almost a sacrilege to raise such a question. And, though it has been answered already in the parable of the tares, yet a brief review seems in order here.

There we found Christ's extended explanation so simple that even a child might understand it; and, that it contained not one word that could be claimed as figurative, except this one—"fire". This statement will surely be accepted as true. Then, under what rule of law, language or literature, can this word alone be taken from its fellows and "explained"? Do men of high literary attainments so use language? Would he who claims here a figure, tolerate for a moment, such treatment of his own carefully pre-

pared sentences, whether in law, philosophy or ethics? Most assuredly not! Shall we then treat his words with less consideration than we demand for our own?

Let us again look at the place where this "furnace of fire" is found.

Let it be emphasized: This phrase never occurs in any parable of Christ! It is found in each of the two *explanations* under this review. If this had been noticed, surely no man would ever have claimed a figure here; for it makes him to use one metaphor to define another metaphor, which is no definition; and, in Him, unthinkable.

Moreover, Christ claims for all his verbal utterances the highest authority,—even the endorsement of heaven. We find it in John 8:28, "As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things". And more specifically in John 17:8, "I have given unto them the *words* which thou hast given me". Not the ideas to be clothed in language of his own; but the very words,—"*verbatim et literatim*".

It was his last quiet hour with his disciples,—just before his betrayal in the garden. They had come to the tender hour of parting. This prayer was his benediction,—his last farewell.

He here furnishes, incidentally, the most positive proof of the literalness of this explanation; for surely his parabolic teachings were the larger part of his words of instruction. Indeed, "without a parable spake he not unto them." Matt. 13:34.

John 8:28 is still more definite: "I do nothing of myself; but as the Father hath taught me I speak these things". The very words.

This writer cheerfully admits that the views here given antagonize the preaching and teaching of many years in which the common and popular explanation was not even questioned. But, when his attention

was called to the fact that the furnace of fire was *not in the parable*, but in the *explanation*, he gave up trying to "explain" it. Indeed, he almost fears to defend Christ's words, lest he be found even as Uzza. It now appears to him, axiomatic. This whole discussion must end in that Rule of absolute authority:

LET CHRIST'S EXPLANATIONS STAND.

He says that the "bad" in the net are the "wicked"; and that "cast the bad away", means cast them into the furnace of fire.

True, it is "horrible", an "awful" thing to say,—a much more horrible and awful thing to suffer; but, it is the tender, loving Savior who says it. It is he who came and suffered and died that he might offer them life, who utters these terrible words. Let us beware that we charge not him with falsehood, with foolishness, or with cruelty.

But, it is said, "He addressed the common people in common language, and his representations, statements and metaphorical descriptions were of one consistent tone. . . . They must have understood him in the common meaning of the terms as then currently received. Christ, therefore, knew perfectly how his hearers would understand his frequently-repeated 'gehenna of fire' ". (Hodge Phil. Lect. '86, p. 447). This is an idea quite common to writers.

Without disparagement of that distinguished scholar, we may modestly ask: Is it clearly established? Was there such a perfect understanding of this phrase so often used, making fire the agent in the punishment of the wicked, as to prevent all liability to mistakes? If such knowledge did obtain then, it has certainly been lost since, for men do not now so perfectly understand it.

But his explanation was given, not to the disciples alone, but to the whole church through all the cen-

turies. The heathen were to read it, the nations and peoples of the world who knew nothing of these peculiar Jewish ideas, and to whom they could not be easily explained. To assume that that peculiar meaning would cling to the words through all the centuries of the church, is a large assumption. That was a wise question of the little girl who asked: "If Christ did not mean what he said, why did he not say what he meant?" The evidence is most convincing, that, in these explanations, Christ did use language adapted to all men at all times, and so simple that the uneducated can easily understand him.

That prince of modern preachers, C. H. Spurgeon, in a sermon published in 1896, says of the fire: "Now, do not begin to tell me that it is metaphorical fire. Who cares for that? . . . And what say the wicked? We do not care about metaphorical fire. There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you have a real body,—a fire exactly like that we have on the earth, in everything but this, that it will not consume, though it will torture you."

But it is objected, "How can fire harm a soul? This we cannot answer as to a disembodied soul; but a soul in a body, is hurt by fire. And bodies, material bodies, do belong to our future state, as all our best theologians agree. Dr. Hodge in the lectures already referred to, (pp. 433, 4) states this strongly, as to Christ and the saved: "Our bodies will be changed, not exchanged. . . . The body of Christ is now material . . . therefore our bodies, like his, will be material".

In the twentieth chapter of the Revelation, after the resurrection of the saints, we read: "But the rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished". There is no distinction. They all alike "lived". The last named "stand before God". (v.12). Hence, in whatever regard the

wicked, when raised "to shame and everlasting contempt" will differ from the righteous, it will not be in the materiality of their bodies.

In this same connection, (Rev. 20), again occurs the mention of fire as an instrument of punishment. The thousand years are ended. The great white throne is set up. "The rest of the dead" left in their graves at the first resurrection, have been raised, together with those who died during the thousand years. Death and hell have given up their dead, and all have been judged according to their works. Now comes the final act. First, "Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death". Then the tares and the bad of the net,—wicked men, receive their portion. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire".

Oh! If Christ did not mean that,—if he did not intend that it should be held up before men as an awful warning to sinners, why should he so continually put it in this form? Six times in the gospels, and other six times in the Revelation, does the loving Savior speak of fire for the wicked. So habitually does he show that awful picture to men!

He places it beside his most gracious pleadings with them. We need but look at John 3:16, that most precious message of the gospel, to see how closely he sets them—even in the same sentence: "God so loved . . . should not perish"! Awful words! Awful experience!

Does this seem unlike the Savior of sinners? Look at him in the midst of that triumphal entrance of Jerusalem. While the multitude were with loud acclaim, rejoicing and praising God for all the mighty works that they had seen, "Saying blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord", "he beheld the city and wept over it". Even while he

wept he uttered those prophetic words of direful doom recorded by Luke (Chap. 19:41-44),—so soon to be written into history. The prophecy was literally and terribly fulfilled a generation later, when Titus with his Roman legions besieged and took and sacked and burned the city, its temple, its palaces and its homes,—by famine, by fire and by sword making the awful holocaust of one million of her people! And why was all this laid upon that beautiful city and her favored sons? “Because”, says the weeping Savior, “thou knewest not the time of thy visitation”. They rejected and crucified their King! And, though it was “through ignorance” they did it, and “had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory”, yet, for that sin, with all its palliations, came this awful visitation of divine wrath. While “mercy and truth go before him”, and he pleads with men to accept his love, yet when mercy is slighted, truth rejected, love despised and tears scoffed at, then he reveals those sterner attributes which are as much a part of the divine character as are love and mercy. Without “justice and judgment” the very throne of God would fall!

As before shown, the fact that this word alone, in the explanation of either of these parables, is even claimed as a metaphor, renders such use improbable here. If this word can be proven a metaphor, using words according to established rules of interpretation, none will receive it with greater satisfaction than will those who defend the literal interpretation. But, if fair treatment of his words forbids a metaphor, we must let it stand as he left it; for only so, can we get the truth he uttered. That we all seek, yea ardently desire, however it may affect our sympathies or offend our aesthetic sensibilities.

Fitting well this argument, though not designed

for just this use, are the strong, timely words of Dr. Hodge: (Phil. Lect's, p. 445): "What we need above all other things that God can give us, is a clear certain knowledge of the actual truth. It is very natural for us to shrink from facing the truth boldly, and to turn away from the evidence of coming danger. . . . If we really wish to be safe we must be honest with ourselves. If we really wish to be honest with ourselves we should suspect our natural tendency to shrink from the evidence which threatens danger, and to resist it with all our might.

"More than this we should recognize the superficiality and essential cruelty of that mock charity which makes so many professed theological reformers, disguise from sinners, or explain away the real facts as to the attitude of the word of God on this subject. Even if mistakes should be made in the way of rendering the aspect of scripture teaching more menacing than it really is, while it might give unnecessary pain for the present, it could not betray souls to unexpected danger hereafter. But there is no more deadly injury, no more wanton cruelty which any man can perpetrate upon a fellow creature, than that which the theological reformer is in danger of when, against the apparent meaning of God's word, . . . he softens the emphasis of warning and assures the incorrigible sinner, that it is not, after all, so certain that he must die the second death of eternal pain and shame."

This is sound teaching, safe advice to all who would lead men to salvation by the truth. And nowhere is it more fitting than in the study before us. In a matter of such infinite importance, wisdom would say,—on the danger side, assume the worst as true and guard against that: you will then be safe against harmful and fatal surprises. Taking such strong

ground in favor of the plainest and most faithful preaching of the direful doom of the finally lost, quoting as he does, text after text where "fire" is given as the agent in their sufferings, we are surprised to find, three pages later, this word: "The fire which is the *metaphor* of their sufferings", etc. With such teachings, which we find along the whole line of biblical interpretations, it is not surprising that fruitage of such seeding should appear. And, indeed it does appear. It is openly charged by those in the church, that no ministers, save a few old ones, ever say anything about hell; and that only a small fraction of the church members believe in it!

Now, open your Bible to Matthew thirteenth and read the parable of the tares of the field, vs. 24-30. Then read vs. 38-43, where Christ explains this parable; and note particularly that this is *an explanation* of the parable by the *author*. Can language be made to express any thought or fact more positively, or in stronger terms than it here asserts that it is men—wicked men, who are here spoken of. You don't believe it? Then the dispute is not between you and the writer of these lines; but between you and the author of this parable. You must settle it with him.

Now turn to vs. 47-50. Here we find again the finalities of human history. The church has accomplished her appointed work. All the millions of the saved are gathered in; but in the net there has been much gathered that is not "good". The time for adjustment has come. The church itself is to be sorted. This is the record: "The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire".

Note here this alarming fact: all these who are involved in this great holocaust are church-members, as men count them. They have made a profession of faith in Christ, and have been baptized in his

name. They have come with God's people around the communion table: have sometimes attended the prayer-meeting. Some of them have wrought miracles in his name. Hear what Christ says of them: "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord have we not prophesied (preached) in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you! Depart from me ye that work iniquity". (Matt. 7:22, 23.) These have their portion with them who were the life-long enemies of the church, its institutions and its Savior.

This is proven, if anything can be proven. There is no escape from this conclusion except by impeaching the veracity of Christ: There is a hell, and it is just what he says it is.

Dear brethren in the ministry: In the early part of this book you assented to the Rule: "Let Christ's Explanations Stand." Here its use is imperative. Twice in this chapter, once of wicked men outside the church, and once again of wicked men in the church, he explains his parables in the same terrible words! They must stand forever. "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name."

A Question! If this word of Christ may be denied, what other word of his can we safely accept?—But, such an impossible suggestion it were idle to discuss. "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in Heaven."

This work, done for the Master, is committed to Him with the prayer that by his blessing it may carry with it a blessing wherever it may go.

IX

PARABLE OF SALVATION

Luke 15:3-32: "And he spake this parable unto them, saying: What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he cometh home he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, rejoice with me! for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle and sweep the house and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, rejoice with me! for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

And he said, a certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his Father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country: and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called

thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and went to this father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to the servants, bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

THE first question to be considered here is, —Have we in this portion of the word, three parables, or only one?

The distinction making it three is commonly recognized, and will probably never be given up, because of the convenience it affords to those writing or speaking of them. For this reason, the several parts will often be spoken of as parables, in the following pages. And yet, a closer scrutiny suggests the other view. Is it not really *one* parable in three parts, representing God's great work for man, in its three principal stages of development?

The seven parables in Matt. 13 are prefaced: "And he spake many things unto them in parables"; and each is introduced by, —"Another parable spake he unto them", —or, "Again".

In the parables under consideration, Luke does not speak of "parables"; but, "This parable spake he unto them". The others are brought in by, "Either what woman", and, "And he said". He speaks of the whole chapter as "this parable".

The three are built on precisely the same model, and seem to be the same parable in three forms, to illustrate the different phases or stages of the divine interference in behalf of the lost race of man. Have

we not here a symbol of the Godhead seen in the divine plan for man's salvation:—three in one, and one in three? Not until we come to see this close relation, this tri-unity shall we be able to see the beauty, or the force, or the harmony of this, the greatest of the parables.

This unity is often lost sight of, or thoughtlessly sacrificed by writers whose piety and learning entitle them to great respect. And though some good men advise,—"Leave out all controversial parts of this discussion"; yet do they seem so essential to the best presentation of the argument, that it would be seriously weakened by the omission. Here is an instance in which not only the unity and harmony are sacrificed, but the parables themselves are so widely separated as to give no suggestion of relationship, much less of unity. It occurs in a volume of thirty-two "*Lectures on the parables*", by Dr. E. N. Kirk. *Lecture III* bears the title: "*The lost silver and the lost sheep,—or, God's mercy vindicated*",—transposing the order of the two. Then, with sixteen lectures intervening, comes *lecture XX*,—"The lost son restored,—or, the sinner's return"! This deals with the younger son. The elder son is curtly dismissed in an introductory remark:—"Then the Pharisee is brought before us, proud, cold, sullen, and murmuring at his father's kindness. . . . His voice is heard amid the anthems of angels and of the church in heaven and in earth, but only in jarring discord, marring the celestial harmony by the grating notes of fiendish pride and jealousy". Very many writers fail here by the character and standing they give to the elder son. Indeed, no greater disharmony is found in any field of biblical criticism than just at this point. Here they give us full inspirations of the love and mercy of God— Here is promised to lost souls per-

fect restoration to the confidence, paternal care and eternal fellowship of a justly offended Father;—and here, in that home so filled with the spirit of compassion and forgiveness, we are made to see an abiding spirit of hatred, pride, jealousy and self-righteousness, that blurs and blots the beautiful picture and mars the heavenly harmony. It is as though when a Neillson, a Patti or a Jenny Linde were rendering with perfect effect that old, loved song, Home, Sweet Home, till in the closing stanza, when thousands of hearts are moved and every eye is filled with tears,—that just then the organ becomes unmanageable and two or three keys in the higher octaves remain open, drowning the sweet melody with their ear-splitting, discordant monotones, till in the end they become the dominant discord of the whole! For such the elder son is made to stand, in this peerless poem of the home-coming of a heart-sick, home-sick, penitent, forgiven man.

To learn and know this parable, we must first find the KEY. That is given us in the second verse of this chapter. It comes from the occasion which drew it out.

The proud aristocracy of the church had been quite willing to have him go into the house of "one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread", even though it be "on the Sabbath day"; but there were some things he did that greatly offended them. He was too popular with the lower classes. "The common people heard him gladly". When the Publicans and sinners crowded around to listen to his teachings, he encouraged them. He had before chosen "Matthew a publican" as one of his disciples. Now they put all the hatred, spite, venom and contempt that burns within them into one accusing, blighting sentence, with which they would fain cover his name with the darkest infamy. It charged a **condition** of social

and moral debasement, that, by their standards, should disqualify any man for a standing in respectable society:

"THIS MAN RECEIVETH SINNERS AND EATETH WITH THEM"!

It was in effect, saying:—You can see what kind of a man he is, by the kind of men he associates with. No good man could desire or enjoy such people as friends! If we would learn the meaning and purpose of this parable we find here the

KEY:—*A personal defence against the personal attack of the Pharisees and Scribes.*

He does not stoop to deny their charge, but asserts a truth as far above their narrow comprehension as his character and life are above theirs; I am come to seek and to save them who are lost. That is the work that my Father has given me to do. I must go where the lost are. I must mingle with them and make them my friends if I would save them.

It is also an imperative condition to the safe interpretation of any portion of God's Word that we adopt, and hold ourselves up to this simple and necessary.

RULE:—*Admit nothing as an interpretation that conflicts with essential gospel truth—nothing that dishonors God.*

This is radical. This is reasonable. This is right. It comes with the force of an axiom. No real lover of the word will knowingly do violence to either part of this rule.

And yet a careful study of the various and contradictory teachings by our best writers, will give painful evidence that this has been done. Impartially apply this rule to all you find upon this parable and those in Matt. 13, and no candid student of the Bible can but be astonished at the results; for it

writes the TEKEL of Belshazzar over so large a part of the parabolic writings of the wisest and best scholars of the church!

From the similiarity in form and object of the various parts, I have called this one parable; and yet either one of the three alone is a perfect parable, for that stage of God's work of salvation to which it belongs. The whole lays before us God's great plan of salvation:—Christ coming to save, and dying to redeem, and the unfailing love of the heavenly Father who accepts all who come back to him confessing their sins and resting on his infinite compassion.

The love of God is placed before us in a series of moving pictures such as only infinite wisdom could draw, each successive view showing it in a stronger light, as the lost one comes to fill a larger place in the whole:—one out of one hundred—one out of ten—one out of two: while in each, as in the whole combined, Christ himself stands the central figure, around which all the parts are grouped with the skill and power of a great artist.

We will now study them separately.

X

SHEPHERD SEEKING A LOST SHEEP

CHRIST INCARNATE—COMING TO SAVE

Luke 15:4-7: "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost till he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance."

THE story is simply and naturally told. The figure was a familiar one.

A man has an hundred sheep in a safe pasture and amply cared for, as was the custom with sheep owners.

By a circumstance always liable to occur, one becomes separated from the flock and wanders away.

He then leaves the ninety and nine and goes to seek the lost one.

Matthew says that he leaves them "in the mountain",—Luke, "in the wilderness"; but as the mountain was a part of the wilderness, there is no confusion here.

The sheep are in their accustomed place, and receiving their accustomed care from the under shepherds, while the owner himself goes to seek the one that has strayed. He finds it and carries it home with rejoicing.

Probably christian teachers will never weary of

this as a type of their work in saving men. They see in it the faithful pastor looking after those of his flock who have "lost their first love", "fallen from grace", or in some way become unfaithful to their vows as christians. They, indeed, see more than this: the pastor looking for, and winning to Christ, those who never were of the flock.

To have this view and use of it set aside, will doubtless give a shock to the average student of the Bible; and yet, this is where we have to come. The shepherd sought only his own that had wandered away: the great work of the church, and those who labor in the gospel, is to "evangelize all nations", carrying the news of salvation to those who have never heard it. The shepherd carried back his recovered one: the pastor never takes, even his wandering members, much less those who are not of his flock, and carries them in by main strength!

If this be referred to the evangelistic work of the church,—men saving men, then some should have gone out from the flock to search for and bring back the wandering one,—the pieces of silver in the purse should be interested in finding the missing coin, and the elder brother should go to that far country to bring the poor swine-herd back to the home and love of the father. This, the whole analogy requires; for God uses men in saving men. Hence the figure fails completely. There were no saved sheep in the fold, nor saved coins in the purse, nor was the son in the home saved; for none of these had ever been lost! Indeed the conditions of the parable nowhere fit the evangelizing work of the church. Not one of the essential features of that work appears in any part of this chapter! The sheep had no volition—the coin was wholly insensate,—and for the lost son, none goes to search.

Again, there was no reason why Christ should re-

pel a personal attack by a reference so remote as that of the work of the church, under a dispensation not yet begun; and which, even when so understood, would not answer a personal charge made against him of keeping low company. So he turns upon them the "argumentum ad hominem": You complain of me for my familiarity with these people! They are children of Abraham, lost from virtue and away from God. I am come to seek and to save them. Would not any one of you do the same for a sheep that was yours? To this they could make no denial. Then in the joy they would feel over the recovery of a sheep, he, by a bold figure, brings before them the joy in heaven over one of these sinners who repents and is saved. For this I am come into this world.

This is the parable of salvation. It tells not of what man does, but of what God does. The sheep and the silver tell how God prepared the way for the offer of salvation; and the last, of the willingness, the joy, with which he receives all who will accept it.

In each of these parables, (for so we must treat them), all mankind is spoken of as a unit: one sheep, one piece of silver, one son. All the preaching, all the forms of missionary work, all the instruments and agencies of the gospel by which men seek to win men back to allegiance to their heavenly father, are the fallen race of man—the younger son—coming back to the father's house. Saved sinners are the instruments in saving sinners.

In this first parable of this series he speaks of his coming, and the object of it: seeking to save. The *coming* of Christ does not save men, nor does his seeking save them, nor yet his dying on the cross! It is by the infinite grace of God that accepts that precious life in place of the life of the sinner who repents and comes back to God.

The incarnation of Christ,—coming in the flesh, was an outward, visible manifestation of God's purpose to save; and this is all that we find in the parable of the lost sheep. It was in anticipation of the final issue of this whole transaction that he spoke of the "joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance".

Here we come to the troublesome factor in this parable. Who are these "just persons"? That word "persons", is the disturbing element. In the old version it is in italics,—a notice to the reader that it was not found in the original, and was supplied by the translators. In the new version the italics are removed, and "persons" appears by authority of the Greek text.

This word has had great influence in determining the thought that these *just* ones are *men*. The Greek adjective, *dikaiois*, used as a noun, means "just persons"; but as we speak of persons in the Godhead, and persons in humanity, why not also of persons as applied to the heavenly beings?

As to who are represented by these just persons, opinions differ. Those who see in the two sons only two classes among men,—finding none just, are led to call this "satire"—taking men at their own estimation of themselves—"a holy irony" against the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees. Very near to this must be placed the words of Archbishop Trench: "There is more real cause of joy over one of these, ('Publicans and sinners'), now entering into the inner sanctuary of faith, than over ninety and nine of those other who lingered at the legal vestibule, refusing to go further in".

Christ did not so gently handle that class of men, as his denunciation,—“Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” seven times in Matthew 23d

chapter witnesses. Surely he did not mean these, when he spoke of "just ones".

The view that makes these just ones, holy, un-fallen beings, and worlds, accords well with reason and sound interpretation. That view will be defended here.

The symbol proves it. Sheep were the wealth of the people. The occupation of a shepherd was honorable. In the far past there was a dynasty of Shepherd-Kings in lower Egypt,—of whom, one is supposed to have been the patriarch Job. History ranks them very high among the Kings of Egypt.

How often, in the Old Testament, God represents himself as a shepherd, seeking to bring back the wandering ones and keep the flock together. That sweet pastoral, the twenty-third psalm, begins: "The Lord is my shepherd". God's people are his flock. And Christ, when he would speak of his watchful, tender care over them says: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep". (John 10:11).

The first half of the chapter here quoted from is Christ's own picture of his loving solicitude and unwearied watchfulness as a shepherd over his own flock.

From the first, the lamb was brought as a sacrifice to God. Abel's acceptable offering was taken from his flocks,—a type of that coming sacrifice that "Is brought as a lamb to the slaughter". John at Christ's baptism testified of him: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". In Rev. 5:12, he is called "The Lamb that was slain".

The sheep is never used in the Bible to represent an evil, bad man. It is sometimes shown to be simple, but never vicious; and could suggest to the oriental mind only that which was good and desirable. The average Jew would instantly repudiate

any teaching, by parable or otherwise, that made the flock left in the fold to stand for hypocrisy, deceit or falsehood. The ninety and nine that never left the fold are—always were,—and always will be, just what the other was before it was lost,—what it is as restored, and what it always will be,—with only the difference that comes from its having been lost and restored. It was a sheep that went out from a flock of sheep. When it is brought back the flock is restored to its original number: *one hundred sheep*. Hence the ninety and nine whom Christ left when he came to this world to seek the one that had gone astray, must be the holy beings in heaven who never sinned. If not so, and if the ninety and nine stand as representing the self-righteous, hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees,—if, as that reasoning logically and inevitably proves, all those left in the fold have, while the wanderer was away, become a pack of ravening wolves,—the rescued one is put back there alone and defenceless,—to be trodden down and killed by the vicious flock! Such a conception is monstrous, impossible!

The difficulty found here becomes emphatic in the last part of this parable. Here man nowhere appears actively. It tells of nothing that he ever sought or asked for. It tells of God, after the counsel of his own will, embodying the eternal Word for the great atoning sacrifice.

It is of his incarnation,—his coming into this world, that he tells us in this parable of THE SHEPHERD SEEKING HIS LOST SHEEP.

XI

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION: DYING TO REDEEM

Luke 15:8-10: "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and neighbors together, saying, rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth".

THIS parable is usually regarded as quite identical with the one before it; or is dismissed with the remark: "Jesus in this parable expresses the same sentiment which he did in the preceding one". Each one separately, or both together, are made to show and teach the work of saved souls in saving other souls. We shall find in it a very different thought.

Our Savior now comes nearer to the accusation made against him.

In the first he tells of his coming to seek the lost: how he left all the holy ones in heaven, and came to this world on a mission of mercy and love. In this we find him here among men, personally seeking out the lost, that he may help them into the way of returning. His mingling with them, which was a necessity to the end he had in view, is the precise ground of their accusation. By this he shows the nature and manner of his work. He appears in the menial capacity of a house-servant, entrusted by the

owner, with the care of ten drachma.

One of these, worth about fourteen cents, she has lost! To her the loss is a serious one. Not only the value of the coin, but her character as a careful, honest servant is involved. She must find it. So she lights a candle, sweeps the house and searches carefully till it is found. The sweeping, suggests an earth floor, the dust of which could easily cover and hide a small coin.

Some one has noticed that the shepherd says, "my sheep which was lost", while the woman says,— "the piece which I had lost". If this has any significance, it seems to be that the woman did not own the money, but was only responsible for its safety: an added evidence of her menial condition. Another feature, lost in our translation, is that she called together her "female friends and neighbors", to rejoice with her.

In this parable the accusation of consorting with the low and the despised, is more directly recognized. As in the preceding one, Christ himself is the one who is seeking the lost,—there a sheep, here a coin. There was a certain dignity in the shepherd going out to find a wandering sheep; but to go down upon the floor and stir up all the dust and dirt accumulated there, is not dignified. There we found the God incarnate for the work of seeking and saving: here the incarnate One, in his deep humiliation in doing that work: "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross". (Phil. 2:8).

There is danger of falling into fanciful or frivolous interpretations, if we try to push the points of identification too far. Some have made the woman, the Holy Spirit, and the candle the word of God. Others find in the woman, the candle, and the seeking, "The indications of the threefold activity of the

preacher, the eldership and the whole church for the saving of the lost one". (Lange, Lk, p. 235).

It seems enough for our present purpose, to note their evident attempt to fix upon him a social and moral degradation. This, they often tried: "He hath a devil and is mad",—"A man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of Publicans and of sinners"; all of which found its climax, its culmination, in the indignities and personal violence which followed his sentence; and in the final execution of it when they crucified him.

In neither of these parables, do we find any suggestion of human effort in offering salvation to man, or human agency in choosing or rejecting it.

If the lost one is man—which none deny—the seeker of the lost is not man. The sheep were not hunting the lost sheep, nor the coins in the purse, the lost coin. It is the owner of the whole flock,—the custodian of the whole ten drachma, who does it. Man appears only as the passive object of divine effort—the passive subject of divine power.

It is all God's work in preparing and offering the great atonement. Whatever interpretation may be given, cannot go beyond this limitation to divine agency in redemption; for these parables do not warrant it.

When we press the symbols so far beyond that as to include man's work in saving men, which, by the testimony of all scripture and all experience, involves the exercise of will, choice, voluntary action by the saved, we open a door for the most serious errors; for we place all mankind under the gracious arrangement that God has made for infants and idiots! There is no "come" no "choose ye", no "whosoever will", no gospel invitation; but men are carried into the kingdom regardless of their choice,—even insensible of the fact.

In that case, how can any be lost? Christ "died for all". If they do perish, it must be the fault of God's servants, who should go and bring them in, *nolens volens*,—as those sought have neither agency nor responsibility in the matter.

But no evangelical christian will accept this, though it be the logical conclusion from his own interpretation of this parable.

When we preach to men it is to move the will and change the purpose. We come to them as free responsible agents, with power to accept or reject Christ and his salvation. This power denied, the whole plan and work of the gospel are meaningless. But, this is not denied. Freedom of choice was an original prerogative of manhood: an attribute of man that survived the sad wreck of Eden. Without it the sin of our first parents had been impossible. Without it man can neither be blamed for wrong doing nor praised for doing well; but is an irresponsible machine.

The atonement of Christ does save, so far as grace can go without impairing the freedom of the human will. We do believe that it includes in salvation those irresponsible from birth; and children dying in infancy. Christ has for them, as for all, satisfied the demands of a broken law; and they, having no personal guilt, are saved by his atoning death.

Not so of those who have come to an age of accountability. Such are sinners, not only by nature, but by their own voluntary acts. They must choose, must accept Christ, must believe. What the atonement does for them is to remove the legal disabilities and make it possible for God to offer terms of salvation.

This provision he makes of his own will, regardless of our act or choice. He asks consent of none

to his coming and dying for sinners. Redemption is an act of his mercy, his grace, his sovereign power. By this Christ saves, just as one saves a drowning man, by throwing to him a life preserver, or pushing out to him a plank to which he may cling. It is the one necessary thing that renders salvation a possible achievement to man.

The conclusion already anticipated is that we cannot press the parables of the sheep and the coin, beyond redemption,—the sovereign act of God's omnipotence and grace. The sheep was carried back: the coin wholly insensate. We cannot conceive in the coin any possible power of volition, or even consent, that could allow it to stand for a self-determining choosing human soul, accepting salvation. But for its value to the owner it might as well be lost as found. It would as faithfully serve him who should steal it, as him to whom it rightfully belonged. It is under the absolute control of its possessor.

In these studies we have found the incarnation and the atonement: Christ's great work of **REDEMPTION**.

Thus Christ brings men back to God,—not actually, but potentially. The Word was made flesh. The great sacrifice of the God-Man has been made. The law obeyed in Christ's life, and its penalties suffered in his death, is satisfied. God has done his part for the restoration of man to his favor. The invitation, "whosoever will", has been given, and the Holy Spirit sent to draw men to repentance. God is ready to welcome back the lost ones. All that is now needed is that man, the sinner, shall repent, turn from the wrong, come to God believing, and accept the gracious offer of pardon and life through Christ. The second invitation now goes out: "Come, for all things are now ready". God, the offended Father is reconciled. He waits with boundless, forgiving

love, to receive back the wanderer, not to the place of a servant, but again as a son, restored to all the love and privileges of the home.

This home-coming we shall find in the next parable.

XII

THE TWO SONS

Luke 13:11: "And he said, a certain man had two sons".

VARIOUS attempts have been made to change the title of this parable. It has been called "The parable of the younger son",—"The parable of the elder son",—"The parable of the lost son". It would be called "The parable of the two sons", had not that title been given to Matt. 21:28-32.

It is probable that this title, "The parable of the Prodigal Son", so universally used, though far from being descriptive, will remain: because, in the "Prodigal" are seen the highest colorings and the strongest contrasts of the picture; and around him the tenderest interest of the parable centers.

Our study here is, the TWO SONS.

The almost universal opinion of writers is that the two sons represent two classes among the Jews: probably because these two appear so conspicuously in the background of the parable. The Pharisees and Scribes are there, haughty, proud, educated, cultured,—the teachers and conservators of a law and ordinances of worship, unquestionably given by Jehovah, to their nation; and in the same view, the Publicans and sinners, upon whom the others looked down in cold contempt, as both socially and morally far beneath them. And they were right in this. The Publicans were usually Hebrews who had made themselves odious by becoming the agents of the Roman government for the collection of a hated tribute, by the paying of which the Jews were stigmatized as

a conquered, vassal people. The "sinners", were the lowest class among the people,—the most degraded and depraved.

While the Pharisee was outwardly moral, his inner life was destitute of godliness and far removed from the spirit and teachings of the Savior. A self-righteous, conscious hypocrite, he was a more hopeless subject for divine grace than was the vilest of those he so despised.

But this view makes both sons bad men. And this is what most writers unhesitatingly do by allowing to the elder son only an external, legal righteousness, which is as hateful in God's sight as is the vilest sin. But what a sad blot it puts on this, the most beautiful picture in the New Testament,—a story to which nothing else in the Bible can be compared. How it breaks up the unity of this sacred trilogy, destroys the harmony of a perfect picture, and brings the wildest discord into the interpretations of this masterpiece of divine wisdom. As before noted, it logically compels an interpretation of the unlost sheep and the silver, that brings them into the same moral degradation. Many writers have in this way compelled themselves to class the ninety and nine "just persons" with the elder son,—all Pharisees together.

The idea impresses each careful student that the sheep, the silver and the sons belong together; and all feel the great wrench when they are separated. If both of the sons are bad, the silver and the sheep are also bad. But how or when they became so, does not appear, for they were all good sheep, good silver and good sons before one of them was lost; and none, save the one, in each case, has ever been lost!

If the sheep and the silver retain their good standing, we must allow the same to both the sons when

in the home. And there is where we must defend them both; for if the elder son deserves the place to which he has been so ignominiously consigned, we cannot forget that the younger son—the reclaimed profligate—goes back into that home where the other has been “always”; and is heir of all.

And what a home! What discord is there! What jealousies between the father and the elder son! What antagonisms between the brothers! And what an awful thing for the young convert just turned from his sinful life! He came with fear and trembling lest the father should deny his prayer. He came confessing his sins and ill desert; and now rejoicing in a new and trembling hope, how can he bear to be put into such a home, where such a spirit is sole heir by right of law? To feel that he is dependent on the grudging bounty of such a man for his daily living, would drive the last vestige of hope or joy from his soul; and love would die. He would eagerly seek a place among the hired servants of his father; and failing in this, would go back where his new life began and herd the swine for a bare living! And he would gain by the change!

But such a supposition is impossible. The father’s spirit pervades that home, and fills all in it. The younger son comes into a home where love rules, and every influence is helpful,—a home in which he shall become strong in the right, and confirmed forever in the ways of purity and truth. And this, notwithstanding the elder son was “angry”.

And yet the voice of christendom is well nigh unanimous that the silver and the sheep are good, but the elder son is “a bad man”.

This confusion comes from the supposed necessity of finding both sons,—all of God’s family—in this world: whereas we have here only an infinites-

imal fraction of it.

Christ is speaking of something wider and more comprehensive than this world. He came from heaven; and when he speaks of God's two sons,—his only heirs,—he does not leave out the heavenly part of that family.

The parable begins,—and ends, with the same two sons,—in the same home; and equally dear to the father.

XIII

THE YOUNGER SON

Luke 15:12-24: "And the younger of them said unto his Father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country; and there wasted his substance in riotous living".

WE all know the story of his wandering, wickedness and want; and the beautiful sequel of it, in his penitent return, and the joy it brought.

For whom does this younger son stand?

All say a sinner. This is right for the period of his wandering; for such is his declared character. It is further quite well agreed, that he represents a class of sinners, as distinguished from another class,—of sinners. Here it would be well to recall Paul's words: "For there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God".

It is with a deep sense of indebtedness to those wise and good men who have studied these parables, that the writer ventures to suggest a new assignment for a part of the characters in this parable.

This has been intimated before; but the point is now reached in this discussion where a clear statement of the fundamental principle upon which it is conducted, should be made.

This study, began by the writer more than three score years ago, early disclosed an inharmony between the opinions of good and learned men, that

was both disappointing and stimulating. This, with a growing sympathy for the elder son, the worst abused character in the Bible, led to a continuance of the study, to the results here reached.

In the younger son we find the whole human race, fallen in Adam and estranged from God.

The idea of a family, a nation, being reckoned as a son, yet dealt with as individuals, is familiar to students of the Bible.

When God sent Moses to Pharaoh to demand the release of his people, he said: (Ex. 4:22, 23): "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first born. And I say unto thee, let my son go, that he may serve me. And if thou refuse to let him go, behold I will slay thy son, even thy first born".

Here the whole nation is a "son", yet God dealt with them as individuals, as their whole history shows. This appears conspicuously in the cases of Noah, Abraham, Job, Moses, Achan, Nadab and Abihu.

In these two parables, God speaks of all his intelligent creatures in all worlds, as his "two sons".

The human race is but an infant of days among the numberless intelligencies created from the days of old,—the most recent of his children. Man, the race,—or Adam its head, is therefore properly called the "younger son".

The usual line of thought on this parable is confined principally to the younger son,—turning, coming back, and the welcome he receives. The most effective and popular text is, "I will arise and go to my Father". This is a most beautiful and impressive lesson. But there are others of deepest interest before we come to that.

Let us look at him before he went away. Where was he then?

He was at home with his father and the family, ministered to by the servants, and had all the rights and privileges of a son. This is a fact to be emphasized. The family was together. There was no dissension and nothing amiss till the younger son became discontented and went out from the home.

He was a son loved, honored and true,—recognized by the father as a rightful heir in the family estate. There was no intimation of inferiority except in age. He held the same relation in the home that the sheep did in the flock and the coin in the purse.

The ninety and nine were no better than was the one lost before he went away: no worse than he, after he was restored. The same was true of the nine pieces of silver. It must be as true of the elder son. He did not degenerate while the younger was away.

Up to the time of his departure, the younger son had not fallen from the confidence or affection of his father. He stood before him, as all there must stand, in perfect obedience,—stood just as the elder brother stood,—“Never at any time transgressed”; for to them and there that was the only possible standing in favor with God. From this state of perfect confidence and obedience he goes out a wanderer from father, friends and home. He takes his portion and goes away, as he thinks, rich.

Have we ever considered what his portion was? It was surely the portion of a sinner. Is it a mere fancy that the estate was Power, Knowledge and Holiness? These united form a complete character. This is the perfection that we find in Christ: “The Way, the Truth and the Life”. It is not difficult to find which portion he took. We go to the Eden story of his defection. It “was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise”. The whole portion, as described by the pen of in-

spiration, was of the earth, earthy. It, alone, was a godless portion.

This one part in three, was all that he, as the younger of the two, could claim. By Jewish law a double portion belonged to the first born son.

This departure, took man away from God, away from innocence, away from an estate of perfect holiness.

Who has thus gone away from an estate of perfect righteousness before God?

The angels who sinned and fell! But if this were they, here were the end of the story. There would be no return. No grace has been found, and no Savior has been offered to them. They are "Reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day".

As we know of no other orders of created beings but angels and men, hence this must be the experience of a man! But, who of men ever departed from a condition of holiness? Had those Pharisees? Had those Publicans and sinners? Have you, or I, or any one we ever knew? Has any one of Adam's descendants ever done it? No, not one of them all has ever departed from such a state; for none was ever in that state. We never were holy. We were born sinners: "By nature the children of wrath, even as others". When we first learned of God and of our relations to him, we were far away and under condemnation. This is true of all men at all times. It is a truth of conscious knowledge; and no truth is more broadly stated in the Word.

One man did have that opportunity. One man had that experience. When the Creator left the man in Eden he was holy,—as holy and sinless as the angels of God. He it was who departed from allegiance to God, by breaking his command.

This is the old, sad story of the sin and fall of our first parents, when, "By one man, sin entered into the world and death by sin". So the fountain head was corrupted and ever since the stream has been defiled.

It is not necessary, nor would it be profitable, to inquire into the specific act of the man,—whether he ate an apple or a pear; nor, indeed, whether that tree, like the tree of life, was then removed from the earth. Enough to know that the act done was something that God had forbidden. The serpent's question, (Gen. 3:1), "Yea, hath God said", calls attention to that command. In her answer the woman shows that she fully understood it. They could eat of every tree of the garden. "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die". It was an intelligent, deliberate act of disobedience of, and rebellion against God. They took the advice of "That old serpent the devil"; and each by a distinct volition, rejected the counsel of God, disobeyed his command and fell from his favor.

Once away, man wandered far in the paths of sin. This perversity has marked his life and character ever since.

When a boy rebels against the authority of a kind and loving father, and leaves a good home, there is no excess in dissipation, no depth of sin, to which he may not go.

Break the centripetal force that holds a planet to the sun, and it will go on, but must go out from its orbit. Man, by sin broke the centripetal force of God's restraining law of love; and now, so far has he gone away, that only a seeking Savior can reach him, and only the forgiving grace of a loving father can restore him.

But the portion he took did not satisfy him. He thought that with the gratification of his tastes and his appetites, and of his desire for knowledge, with the freedom of being his own master, he should be happy;—but, “he began to be in want”. He was accustomed to a home, and to a father’s loving authority; and for these his soul longed. The very freedom he so desired has become weariness to him; the indulgence of his tastes and passions, has surfeited his soul; and the knowledge he coveted has led him into fatal excesses. None of these things has power to make that riotous life—even endurable. He begins to long for any place near to his father and the home. He goes into new and greater excesses to satisfy that felt want, and finds only an added unhappiness. He has been living under a great delusion; and only when that is broken, can he think or act,—or do the right.

But, “He came to himself”. Then he began some serious thinking. He soon found himself coveting even the luxuries of the hired servants in his father’s house! Then he bravely determined to go back and ask his father for a place among them.

As this is more an exegesis than a homily, it will not be needful to follow all the steps marked in this most beautiful story. It is as familiar as household words. We see him, driven by his needs, then drawn by the known love of the father and moved by a returning loyalty, make his resolve: “I will arise and go to my father”. Under a deep sense of his sin against heaven, and in the father’s sight, he goes back with his humble confession, and his request for the place and pay of a servant. But, that place he can never have there. The angels are the “ministering spirits”, (servants), in that home; but he is a son. And, whether in the home or out of it,—whether accepted or rejected by the father,—in hon-

er, or in disgrace,—he can never have any other relation there, than that of a son. He was a son when away. He can be nothing else.

So of man the sinner: however far he may go astray, and however bad he may become,—even when he has forfeited all claim upon his father and stands disinherited, he is yet a son. And though, having received his inheritance, he has no claim upon the paternal estates, the grace of adoption restores him to his place, and gives him again the standing and rights of a son.

The prodigal comes home to be a servant: the father receives him as a son. As a son, he forgives him: as a son he honors him. A feast of the best things is prepared in honor of the event. At command of the father, the servants put on him the best robe,—a ring on his hand—the badge of sonship,—and shoes on his feet; and they bring out the fatted calf and kill it, and make a great feast; and all united in the great gladness.

This joy is mentioned in each of the three parables, as the joy of holy ones in heaven over the recovering of the lost. Christ so interprets it, in the parables of the recovered sheep and the coin: showing that at every stage of that great work he had distinctly in view the salvation of men. He is now in the first stage. The deep abasement of that shameful death before him, they know nothing of. He, seeing the glorious results of that death, by anticipation, tells of the joy it will give to those who never sinned.

In the first parable he speaks, in a general way, of joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,—whether he be a Pharisee or a Publican. In the second he tells of the angels,—those messengers from heaven to men, who bind this world and the heavenly home in bonds of closest sympathy and most

loving care: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth". In the third he brings us into heaven itself, filled with feasting and festivity and ringing with songs and shouts of holy joy over the recovery of one who "was dead and is alive again—was lost, and is found".

This is the returning sinner. The father sees him while "yet a great way off", painfully plodding through a sinful world. He, in Christ, the incarnate Word, runs to meet him in that far distance; gives the kiss of reconciliation; the badge of sonship; and puts on him the best robe:—the robe of Christ's spotless righteousness; and brings him into the heavenly home with gladdest joy.

He comes back as a son, but not on the same standing as before. Then he stood in *righteousness*, with the elder son and all the holy ones in heaven: now he stands in *grace*,—a new ground of standing in favor with God: a new revelation in heaven that will to all eternity memorialize this surprising thing! This salvation by grace, which "The angels desire to look into", is the place and standing of each saved sinner of all the millions of earth: "Faultless in the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy".

This new standing gives a new song in heaven, which only the saved sinner,—the reclaimed, restored prodigal son, can sing: "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation". (Rev. 5:9).

The objection may be raised: Do you not, by making the younger son in his going out stand for the whole race of man, give occasion, in his return, for the doctrine of salvation for all?

Surely not. A careful study of this parable, clearly shows the harmony of his teaching here, with that al-

ready studied in Matthew 13. This satisfies the objection.

Mankind, in its representative head, departed from God by a voluntary act: the woman and the man, each in an individual capacity, disobeyed a known command of God. In that same way they must return. The provisions of the gospel are for individuals; and only such can accept or reject them.

But again: The atonement of Christ does reach and include all the race, as the satisfaction of the law. The assertion is distinctively made, (2 Cor. 5: 15) that "He died for all"; and (Heb. 2:9) "That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man".

In his infinite mercy and grace he has made an atonement "Sufficient for, adapted and sincerely offered to all". Under it he finds a place for all those who were never conscious of sin, whether by infancy or by inborn disabilities.

The atonement of itself saves no responsible moral agent. Christ in his death, just opens the door by removing the legal bars that held it; and each passes through or not, as he will. Each must for himself repent of his sins, believe the message and accept of Christ as his personal Savior. By these he comes under God's arrangement for salvation for sinning men.

In this study we have found the younger son to stand for,—not a class of sinners among men; but a race among God's created intelligences. The argument may be briefly summarized:

1. Adam, and he only of all the human race, "by ordinary generation", ever was innocent and holy before God;

2. He alone of the race ever departed from God, and fell from a state of holiness;

3. To him and to his seed alone, have mercy and grace ever been extended;

4. This teaches no new doctrines. They are the old facts of sin and redemption that our fathers held and taught; and which we must hold and teach, even in their severer features, if we would honor Christ and reconcile men unto God;

5. It brings this lesson, naturally, to the great, essential doctrines of the gospel:

All have sinned:

All are alike condemned:

Christ died for all:

All are invited to return to God:

Whosoever will may come:

All who come will be accepted;

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life”.

XIV

THE ELDER SON

Luke 15:25-32: "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry and would not go in: therefore came his father out and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this, thy brother, was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found".

WE come now to that character in this parable, that has occasioned the greatest embarrassment to students and writers on this scripture. And yet he seems to be easily disposed of, for with one consent he is condemned. The severest censures and reproaches are laid upon him.

To quote all that various writers say of him were a burdensome reiteration of epithets and accusations. He is set down as a Pharisee, a hypocrite, and an all-around mean, envious, bad man, who, from his nature must antagonize every kind impulse, every generous purpose and every loving service. As heir to the estate he most grudgingly sees shelter and food

given to his returned brother.

We might relieve the home from this discordant spirit, and end this chapter here, if we could accept the myth that Lange quotes from Michaelis, that "He forsook his father with indignation, went into a strange land, became there much more unhappy, more despised, more vicious than his brother had been. He was held as a slave, and finally captured in company with bands of robbers". (Lange, Luke, p. 243).

This accords well with Trench, (p. 322), "It is impossible to read the parable, without an ominous presentment, that the elder brother *does* refuse to the end to go in."

These ideas are extreme; but their harmony with the general trend of thought in this connection makes them consistent.

This elder son with all the advantages of a whole life with such a father, must be the worst, or the worst abused character in the New Testament! For centuries he has borne a reputation as the meanest and most reprehensible of men.

Does he deserve such a character? Has Christ put into this otherwise most charming picture, as the one nearest to the father in the home, one who is worthy to be so assailed, condemned and held up as an awful warning, before every young man and young woman and every child that studies his precious teachings, in all the Bible classes, and all the Sunday Schools and in all the Christian Endeavor Societies, and in all the infant classes of christendom?

But so it is. Among all the sermons, commentaries, and notes on the Sunday School, Christian Endeavor and Prayer Meeting lessons, that have gone into the religious literature of this generation, you will hardly find one word of commendation for the

elder son.

We have traced the showing forth of God's great love to sinners, under the symbols of the sheep and the coin, which were never bad only lost; and now come to its climax in the forgiving, loving heart of the father, welcoming with joy, a disobedient, degraded, but penitent son. And yet, at the very moment when this pity and love do most appear, we are met, in that same home, by the dark scowling face of the acknowledged heir, out of harmony and sympathy with all around him!

Surely there is some mistake! Such a character for him mars and destroys this, the most beautiful thing our Savior has given us.

Let us study it by the helps which the story itself furnishes.

It has been said before that the elder son stands for those who were created holy, and never departed from their original holiness.

This assertion needs more than the mere statement of it. It must be clearly shown to be true; for here is the point of departure in this study. Herein is its radical difference from the accepted theory and interpretation.

The charges upon which the elder son has been so universally arraigned without charity and condemned without mercy, are based upon two facts found in the parable:

"He was angry, and would not go in"; and said, —"Neither transgressed I at any time, thy command". Upon these two charges, which are proven beyond dispute by the parable itself, he has been condemned, maligned and ostracized from respectable company. It is always easier to join in the voice of censure than to render justice to one accused of wrong.

We will examine him on the two charges, sepa-

rately:

"He was angry, and would not go in".

We are shown a willful, obstinate, angry man, filled with jealousy and hatred; and the question is asked,—“Is that the spirit of one who never sinned?” No: certainly not! But, who puts such a spirit into the elder son? Where is the proof of such a character in him? “Oh, he was angry”! But anger does not justify so grievous a charge. Anger is not inconsistent with a christian character among men. Paul says to the Ephesians, (4:26), “Be ye angry and sin not”. If a man, a forgiven sinner, whose power of resistance has been weakened by sin, can be angry and sinless in it, most undeniably one who never sinned, can be angry without prejudice to his sinless character.

Again: “God is angry with the wicked every day”. Or, leaving out the italics, and taking the revised version (Ps. 7:11) “God is a righteous judge, yes, a God that hath indignation every day”. And the context plainly indicates that it is the wicked, plotting against “the upright in heart”, against whom his indignation is directed. Now, if God is angry with the wicked every day, that establishes the contention that “anger” is consistent with holiness.

But the crowning proof of his pharisaic spirit is found in his claim to perfect obedience: “Neither transgressed I at any time thy command”.

Calling him a Pharisee seems a ready solution of all the difficulty. But is this just?

No one will deny that this is a proper claim for a holy being in the heavenly home. His continuance there depends upon just that character and that perfect obedience. The moment he transgresses he must take his place among the angels that sinned, and were cast out from heaven.

And few will deny that something very near to

such a perfect life is possible of an earthly, human child, to an earthly father. There are homes where parental commands are so wisely given and so lovingly enforced, that the child has no desire to disobey a command, or to disregard a known wish of its parents. Many parents can testify to such children.

The analogy of the sheep that never went astray, and the pieces of silver that never were lost but were always good, and acceptable to the owners, should suggest a good character for the eldest son, who never left the home. Sheep,—silver,—sons: how suggestive of that which is pitied, valued, loved.

The difficulties found in this parable, come from the hopeless confusion of its characters. They take a human soul in this world, and make it say to God, "I have never transgressed". Then, the assertion of the elder son is necessarily denied. He is a Pharisee. On that assumption no other conclusion is possible.

It is faulty logic and worse theology, to say, as did one honored author of nearly two hundred years ago, that here is meant a legal righteousness that has kept from a gross and abandoned life, "Those who are really good, and have been from their childhood up, and never went astray into any vicious course of living, who comparatively need no repentance". This author does not pronounce him a Pharisee; but, with all his efforts to save him, falls into the popular idea,—calling him "fretful", "envying", "boastful", "ill humored towards his brother",—"said more than was true",—and finally gives him "the spirit of the Pharisees".

Such a claim,—perfect obedience towards God,—the Pharisee did not make. Though he did thank God he was "not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, nor even as this publican", yet he never dared to stand before God and say, "I have never

transgressed”.

Note also that it is Christ who puts these words into the mouth of the elder son. If the claim as made was false, he would surely have exposed its falsehood. But he does not, but he rather affirms it: “Son thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine”.

This has been called “The keenest and most loving rebuke”,—“Holy irony”,—“Loving satire”. Not so did he deal with the Pharisees,—as his “Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites”, seven times repeated in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, testifies.

The father’s answer is significant. His first word is “Son”. In this he recognizes between them, the closest relation among men. There is in this word a tenderness, a confidence, an affection, wholly inconsistent with the idea of a “loving satire”. There is no possible suggestion of censure in it.

“Thou art ever with me”. “With me”, not only by your presence in the home, but in sympathy, in harmony of spirit and in loving obedience. He in effect says to the son, I have always received from you the most perfect filial love and obedience. This gives to the elder son all that he claims.

Christ expressed the same thought again, when he said (Matt. 12:30), “He that is not with me is against me”.

But he adds yet another word which should end all this controversy with regard to the character of the elder son: “All that I have is thine”. It would be carrying satire into falsehood to represent God as saying that to the Pharisees!

It is becoming to call attention again to the fact, questioned by none, that the one interested in each parable, in saving the lost one, is God, the Heavenly

Father. God's love to sinners is the great object lesson that Christ brings us in each parable. Whether the two sons be called men and angels, or Pharisees and vagabonds, God stands as the father. That these two sons are the only heirs, is shown in verse twelve: "He divided unto them his living". That is, he made a division of the whole estate as between the two, and paid off the younger. This settlement shows that we have the whole household of God before us in the parties to this transaction, as the father says to the elder son, "All that I have is thine".

If now, as the almost universal voice of christendom asserts, the elder son stands for those whom Christ most vehemently denounced,—if he be the very incarnation of pride and hate and envy and self-righteousness, and the younger son be just as Christ pictured him, what a character it gives to the family of which God is the head! Nay what a caricature of all that is sacred and holy in the home of our heavenly Father! And this some, we must think, thoughtlessly, leave room for. Lange, (Luke, p. 243) calls this "The parable of the two lost sons; or the two main forms of the essence of sin"; and this, after he had said, on the eleventh verse, (p. 238), "The man is here the image of God".

In a sermon heard by the writer in Watertown, New York, in 1887, by an eminent educator of Kingston, Ontario, the preacher distinctly said: "That the younger son was a bad man, goes without the saying; but the elder son is the worse man of the two". Then he made him to stand, as all do, for "The Pharisees and Scribes, who were the best portion of the church at that time". Then, he set him forth to represent the church of Christ through all the centuries since, citing as proof all the persecutions that God's people have suffered from them who acted in the name, and by the authority of "the

church"! "O mirabile dictu"! "Tell it not in Gath—publish it not in the streets of Askelon". It did have one rare merit for a sermon on this parable—consistency!

It is amazing, almost beyond belief, that the church, through all these centuries of light, and consecrated study of the word, should have so meekly submitted, or so weakly accepted such a misrepresentation and caricature of the very heaven towards which we are all striving, by forgetting that God stands at the head of this family,—even as explained by those who so readily fill it with pharisaical hypocrites.

From this study the conclusion seems inevitable that the elder son is just what he claims for himself, and stands for the unfallen, the righteous,—the "just ones that need no repentance".

It is strange that christian scholars have not long ago seen this, and made the truth to appear. Sometimes they come so near, that they must needs have found it, but for the predestinated Pharisee in the elder son.

Archbishop Trench concedes every essential fact, then comes to a conclusion seemingly regardless of the facts conceded. In his closing paragraph on the lost sheep, (Par's, p. 293), he says: (*italics his*): "The ninety and nine have *not* wandered, the nine pieces of silver have *not* been lost, the elder son has *not* left his father's house". Now he seems ready to give the elder son his rightful place; and to all, —sheep, silver, sons, their original integrity and character. But, (referring to something not quoted here,) he adds: "These difficulties will only disappear, when we regard these 'righteous' as such indeed, but their righteousness as merely legal, of the old dispensation, so that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he". It is hard to hold this

pen from writing something that would be improper to say in connection with such honored names.

These Scribes and Pharisees have been on duty here these many centuries. Is it not time to relieve, yes *discharge* them, and find in the home of our heavenly father, elements of harmony and piety that will make it a safe place for the penitent, returning prodigal?

Men find evil in the claim of holiness, and in the anger of the elder son, because the idea of his pharisaical character is so wrought into their thinking, that they assume in him a vindictive, evil spirit, and judge each word and act, under that assumption. They encircle him with a halo of hypocrisy and meanness, and then see and judge him through that. The jury is prejudiced and incompetent to give a verdict. The witnesses testify what they have heard from "the traditions of the elders",—not from knowledge gained in the study of the word.

We now come before the higher court of an enlightened christian public, and ask for a new trial for the accused.

We have shown the errors of the court convicting him, the inadequacy of the testimony, and the weakness of the whole case as conducted; and believe that our appeal rests on a basis laid in truth and equity.

The interview between the father and elder son, presents some of the most dramatic situations found in this parable.

There are, in the mystery of salvation, "Things the angels desire to look into": things they could not understand.

The unfallen ones in heaven had seen angels rebelling against God,—cast out from heaven,—and "Reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day"; (Jude 6); and

they had no conception, hope or thought of their possible deliverance.

They had also seen man, made holy, in the image of God, break his command, fall from his favor, and go out from Eden, in disgrace and condemnation. They knew that the penalty of that disobedience was death; and that sentence had been passed upon him under a law that had never been set aside, and must be enforced. There was no precedent for mercy.

The elder son stands here, holy, sinless, in absolute righteousness, the embodiment of God's perfect and holy law,—unrepealed, and forever unrepealable,—unreconciled, and forever unreconcilable to sin! In the name of that law he enters his firm protest against receiving back into favor with God, any who have incurred its penalties and are under its condemnation. And he has a strong case. His contention is grounded upon justice and truth. If such are to be restored, the law is brought into reproach, and the divine government is a failure!

Take out from this parable this protest of the law, and you can preach unconditional and universal salvation from this whole series of parables; for the sinner comes back with no intercessor and no questioning of his perfect right to be there; and is welcomed with demonstrations of joy, as though one had returned from some perilous expedition in the interest of the family!

We find here a window opened into heaven. We look in upon secrets of eternity! It is just at that supreme moment when it was first published to the holy beings there, that grace was found, and mercy could be shown to those who had once come under condemnation: that God *could* be just, and the justifier of a sinner!

Here, "Mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other". (Ps.

85:10). "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad": that is, as the word means, "one must, ought, should, it is necessary". It is therefore right to do this.

This ends the whole discussion. There is not another word from the elder son. He is satisfied; and goes in to dance and rejoice with the others. All the demands of the law have been fully met. Man was condemned, and the man Christ Jesus has borne his punishment. The whole atoning work and suffering of the God Incarnate, was told, and grace proclaimed as a new ground of standing in God's favor, in "This thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found". He who was dead now lives! "I am . . . the life". "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand". Sinners are saved, and saved forever! What wonder that the first announcement of this great salvation should fill all heaven with joy?

There is a painful sense of something lacking, something out of place,—a consciousness of disturbed harmony and broken unity in this parable as usually interpreted. So evident is this that he who said that "the ninety and nine just persons do not of necessity mean anybody" wrote for the same Sunday School lesson: "The elder brother stands for the same as do the ninety and nine sheep, and the nine pieces of silver".

The view here defended places him there without degrading them; while it establishes a unity in plan and teaching that every lover of the Bible knows must be there. It restores the lost harmony, and shows the unfolding of a thought and of a definite purpose, running through all the parables of this series.

In the first, Christ shows to us himself, the incar-

nate God, coming to seek the lost; in the second, we see him humbling himself to save; and in the third, he stands the divine Redeemer and Intercessor, satisfying the law and saving the transgressor.

This also preserves the high rhetorical character of this discourse, finding its climax in this crown jewel of the parables of Christ,—“The Prodigal Son”.

This has been called “an anti-climax”: one hundred—ten—two with one lost from and restored to each member. It is a most impressive climax. The lost portion is first *one* hundredth, then *ten* hundredths, then *fifty* hundredths. First a sheep, a thing of commercial value,—then a coin, the concrete form of wealth,—and finally a son, whose value has no measure.

The truth taught and reiterated in each one of the parables, is God’s great love for sinners.

If that love would cause him to go and seek one lost from a hundred, he would be more impelled by it, when one out of but ten was lost; but how much more would his love draw him to seek and to save, when one being lost only one remained; and that lost one, not a sheep, not a senseless piece of silver, but a *son*, with a nature and capacity for the keenest enjoyment and the most intense suffering!

The joy over the recovery shows a similar climax: first, in heaven, a general statement—then the “angels of God” are moved with joy—and in the last, heaven itself is disclosed as a scene of the greatest festivity. In the father’s house a rich feast is prepared; and the many mansions are filled with festal joy. All the vaulted arches of that heavenly home ring with the glad song of those who never sinned and never had need of repentance: The lost is found—the dead is alive—a sinner has repented—a soul is saved!—Grace! Grace! Grace!

The varying ratio between the lost and them that remained,—one in a hundred, one in ten and one in two, while it cuts off all speculation as to the relative numbers of the human race and the holy ones in heaven, yet, in the final classification, embraces the whole universe of God's intelligent creatures.

Our Savior gives here *three* parables, the divine number for the Trinity. This equally forbids the confounding of the first two, and the perverting of the last. It is as before shown, a *triune* parable.

The Pharisee-interpretation, dishonors God. It is a reproach to the Heavenly Father, a scandal upon the name of God's children, a discord in the symphonies of celestial praise, and a dark blot on the Lamb's Book of Life!

The interpretation found in this study, honors God. It makes him the father of two faithful, worthy sons. One has been disobedient. He repented, returned, and God is now the Father in a reunited family circle with the old confidence restored, and the old love binding all together in the closest companionship; and a new joy thrills every heart in all the countless throngs that bear allegiance to that dear loving father.

How attractive is now that home! How blessed! How pure! How holy! How safe and how helpful a place for the restored son! He is in the home he so longed for in that far land, and every influence helps him: the father's love, the brother's warm sympathy, and the gladness which even the servants manifest at seeing him again in his accustomed place.

This tells the story of God's plan and work for man's salvation: the coming of Christ to seek the lost—his humiliation even unto death to make redemption—and the undying pity in the father's heart for the erring and the lost, when they come confessing their sins and asking restoration to his

favor.

The picture is perfect and complete: Christ incarnated and dying to redeem—the sinner turning and coming back—the Father receiving him with a forgiving kiss—and all the holy ones in heaven rejoicing over the salvation of a soul,—while the boundless love of God to man shines through it all, illuminating it with the light of the glory of heaven.

We are now ready for the final answer to the question of identity. Here are the two sons: *two grounds of standing before God*: the only possible standing there.

One has, himself, kept perfectly the law of righteousness and stands in sinless purity: the other, in his substitute, has both kept the law and suffered the penalty of sin, and stands in imputed righteousness,—“Not under the law, but under grace”. (Rom. 6:15). So we all as saved sinners have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.

These, are then the names of the two sons in Heaven:

The elder, LAW.

The younger, GRACE.

And both equally righteous before God.

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